

# **Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth**

## **A Wayfarer's Journey Through Grace**

**By Skyler Thomas**

*With Original Songs and Devotionals*

**Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth**

*A Wayfarer's Journey Through Grace*

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# Dedication

To those still in the swamp,  
who haven't yet heard the call.

To those at the water's edge,  
learning what it means to be washed clean.

And to those walking in unforced rhythms,  
discovering that grace is not just sufficient—  
it's everything.

This is your story too.

And most important, to my loving wife and children who didn't leave  
me when things got at their worst. You make life pure joy.

\*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord,  
and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."\*

— Augustine

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# **Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Introduction)**

## **The Wayfarer's Anthem**

*"I used to think love was something I earned. Then I met it in a swamp. Covered in mud, gasping for air, convinced I was too far gone—that's when I felt it. Not a rescue that pulled me out immediately, but a presence that sat with me in the muck and whispered, 'I'm here. I've been here the whole time. And I'm not leaving.'"*

## **Who This Book Is For (And What It's Really About)**

Are you tired? Not just physically tired—soul tired. The kind of tired that sleep doesn't fix.

Do you ever lie awake at night wondering if there's more to life than what you're experiencing? Do the achievements feel hollow? Do the relationships feel exhausting? Does the constant striving to prove you're enough feel... well, like it's never enough?

If any of that resonates, this book might be for you.

Because here's what I've discovered: there's another way to live. Not perfect. Not easy. But different. Better. More real.

And you don't have to figure it out alone.

Now, I need to be honest with you about something: this is a book about finding something more. And that "something more" is a spiritual connection—but probably not the kind you're thinking of.

This isn't about religion. It's not about joining a church or converting to any particular faith tradition. But yes, I'm going to introduce you to some faith-based authors. Yes, I'll cite passages from the Holy Bible. Because these ancient texts and thinkers have mapped this journey before us, and their wisdom matters.

Here's what this book IS about: introducing you to a God who created you and loves you exactly where you are right now. Not where you should be. Not where you wish you were. Right where you are.

**If you've never been to church**, that's okay. You might actually have an advantage—fewer bad experiences to unlearn.

**If you walked away from church years ago**, I get it. I did too. The institution failed a lot of us. But this isn't about going back to what hurt you.

**If you're not sure you even believe in God**, stick with me. I'm not asking you to sign a statement of faith. I'm inviting you into a story—mine, and maybe yours—about what happens when you stop pretending and start being honest.

Here's the thing: I'm going to talk about God. About Jesus. About finding something real in the middle of the mess.

But I'm not going to ask you to believe it all right now. I'm just asking you to consider: *What if there's a Love that meets you exactly where you are? What if you don't have to clean yourself up first? What if the brokenness you're carrying is the exact place where healing begins?*

**This is what I mean by "spirituality" instead of "religion":**

Religion says: Follow the rules, perform well, and maybe you'll be acceptable.

Spirituality says: You're already known, seen, and loved. Now come find out what that means.

I talk about **God** as the source of love that doesn't depend on performance. **Jesus** as God in human skin, showing what Love looks like. **The Spirit** as God's presence that can live in you and transform you from the inside out.

**Why would this matter to you?** Because maybe you've tried everything else—achievement, relationships, morality—and it's all come up short. Not because you're doing it wrong, but because you were designed for something deeper.

An old theologian named Augustine said it: *"Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."*

That restlessness? That's your soul telling you there's something real to find.

**This book is for the messy, the broken, the burned-out, the skeptical, the searching.** Questions are allowed. Doubt is part of the journey. You don't have to have it figured out.

If that's you, keep reading. Let's walk together.

## **Setting the Scene: The Crash**

You know that moment when you can't keep pretending anymore?

For me, it came in whispers:

*"I can't do this anymore."*

Eight words. Not eloquent. Not packaged. Just real.

And honesty—raw, desperate honesty—became my first step toward something better.

Then my world crumbled into pieces I could hardly recognize.



## **The Crisis and the Promise**

It was more than burnout. It was a moral breakdown—an unraveling of the life I'd tried to hold together. My performance-based identity collapsed. I crossed boundaries those closest to me couldn't accept. As a leader, husband, and father, I lost the trust that defined my identity.

What remained? Shame. Emptiness. And the desperate hope that I could still be loved.

But here's what I discovered:

Love meets us exactly where we are. Not where we should be. Not where we pretend to be. Exactly where we are—mud and all.

## **My Story of Burnout**

Everything looked right from the outside. Working harder. Mentoring people at work. Involvement in community. Being a good family man. People looked to me as an example of service and commitment.

But underneath? Relationships fracturing in ways I couldn't control or understand.

At work, conflict I couldn't navigate. Conversations that went sideways no matter how carefully I tried. My boss pulled me aside one day with words that landed like a punch: the dynamic wasn't working, and I was part of the problem. What?! I had no idea. But surely I could have recognized the signs.

At home? Even worse. The kind of tension you can feel in the air before anyone says a word.

I was trying so hard. Pouring hours into teaching. Creating content. Showing up for people. But internally? Drowning. Wondering if I could make any of it work. Wondering if anyone noticed I was falling apart.

Then the facade crumbled.

What I'd been hiding—what I'd managed to keep in the shadows while maintaining the appearance of having it all together—could no longer stay hidden.

And the institution I'd trusted? The community I'd served so faithfully? They didn't know how to handle brokenness. No resources for restoration. Only consequences. Instead of healing, I heard condemnation. Instead of compassion, I felt rejection.

It felt like friendly fire—wounded by the very people who were supposed to carry my burdens. The ancient wisdom says, "Carry each other's burdens." Instead of being carried, I was crushed.

So I walked away.

Into the swamp of shame, isolation, and despair. Into a place where the questions were bigger than the answers and the pain was more real than the platitudes.

Henri Nouwen, the brilliant writer who himself walked through seasons of severe depression, named what I was experiencing:

*"There is a deep hole in your being, like an abyss. You will never succeed in filling that hole, because your needs are inexhaustible... You have to work around it so that gradually the abyss closes. Since the hole is so deep and your anguish so total, you run away from it, afraid that you will fall into it." — Henri Nouwen, The Inner Voice of Love*

That abyss—that bottomless hole—I'd spent years trying to fill it with performance of hard work and good deeds, community approval, maintaining the image, and working more hours to accomplish tasks in order to make me feel better about myself. But in the swamp, I was too tired to run. And I no longer resisted moral temptation. Now I had to look at it. I had to face what I'd been avoiding.

Maybe you can't relate to my specific story. The details might be different.

But perhaps you know someone who's walked a similar path. Or maybe you've walked a different path with the same ending: wounded to the point of wanting out. Standing in the wreckage where the pieces can't be put back together.

That's where this journey begins.

Not in victory, but in the swamp. Not with all the answers, but with the honesty to admit we don't have them.

## **The Years of Performance**

For years, I'd been living as an impostor—shaped by others' expectations rather than who I really was. A leader who felt nothing. Giving advice I didn't believe. The "strong one" who was actually drowning.

More money. Recognition. People saying, "Your teaching has really helped me." And all the while, exhaustion grew beneath the performance like water undermining a foundation.

Then the façade cracked. In a counseling session I finally said: "I don't know if I believe any of this anymore."

I waited for condemnation. But what came instead was terrifying freedom. The freedom of admitting: "I can't do this anymore."

## **The Journey Metaphor: Three Movements**

So where does this journey take us?

This book follows three movements—three stages of the journey from performance to authenticity, from drowning to dancing, from the swamp to the unforced rhythms of life.

## **The Swamp**

This is where we're stuck. The quicksand of shame. The muck of failure. The waters of despair rising.

Dark water you can't see through. The smell of rot. Heavy silence. Muck that clings and pulls. Everything exhausting.

This isn't just depression (though it might include that). This isn't just spiritual dryness (though that's part of it).

This is the accumulated weight of years of performing instead of being. Conversations that felt hollow. Service that felt like work. Community that felt like critique. Meaning that became a burden instead of a gift.

An ancient writer knew this place:

*"Save me, O God, for the floodwaters are up to my neck. Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire; I can't find a foothold. I am in deep water, and the floods overwhelm me. I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched. My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me." — Psalm 69:1-3 (NLT)*

Worn out calling for help.

That's the swamp.

*Pause and consider: Have you ever felt this way? That sinking feeling, the exhaustion of trying to keep it all together?*

Why spend so many chapters talking about the swamp?

Because it isn't a niche struggle—it's epidemic. The swamp shows up everywhere. In the writings of thinkers across centuries. Because it is the universal human condition.

It's so common that many never even stop to name it. For some, it becomes the assumed backdrop of life: heavy, stagnant, normal. Others rationalize it, assuming that true depth requires long seasons of despair.

And candidly? There are millions who don't even realize life doesn't have to be this way. They've made peace with the swamp because they've never glimpsed the possibility of another kind of life.

That's why it matters to pause here.

Because until we name the swamp for what it is, we can't imagine leaving it.

## **The Water's Edge**

The transition space.

You've dragged yourself (or been dragged) out of the swamp. Now you're at the edge of something clean, something clear. Living water. The kind that refreshes. That quenches real thirst. That becomes a spring within you.

But you're terrified to step in.

Why? Because you're filthy. Covered in swamp muck. Reeking of failure and shame. You're convinced the water will reject you. That you need to clean up first before you can approach.

This is where love does its most subversive work.

Where you discover that the invitation isn't "Clean yourself up and then come."

It's "Come as you are, and restoration will find you."

An ancient letter put it this way: *"But because of great love for us, the Source of all mercy made us alive even when we were dead in our broken patterns—it is by radical kindness you have been saved."*

Even when we were dead. Even when we were in the swamp.

That's when healing came.

## **Unforced Rhythms of Life**

Life after surrender.

Not perfection, but participation. Not arrival, but walking.

There's an ancient invitation that speaks to this:

*"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." — Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)*

Unforced rhythms—that's what this final movement is about.

Picture someone who's learned to swim—or better yet, learned to float. Still in the water, but no longer fighting it. No longer exhausting yourself trying to stay afloat through sheer effort. Learning to rest in the water that holds you.

One spiritual teacher captured the essence of what the world needs most:

*"The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'people of Christ' will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence." — Dallas Willard, The Great Omission*

The unforced rhythms are about becoming apprentices—not of a religious system, but of a way of life. Learning to live sustainably, authentically, in the flow of grace rather than the grind of performance.

## Setting Expectations

So what can you expect from this book?

This isn't a how-to book. I don't have five steps to fix your life.

What I have is a story—mine, and maybe yours too. What I have is fourteen songs that became fourteen chapters that became a map through the swamp.

What I have is the conviction that love is real, that it's for wayfarers like us, and that it meets us exactly where we are.

One writer put it this way:

*"The broken human is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: we are rebels who must lay down our arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground up—that is the only way out of our 'hole.'" — C.S. Lewis*

This book is about laying down arms.

About surrendering the self-salvation project. About admitting we've been on the wrong track and getting ready to start over.

It's about discovering what one ancient teacher discovered: *"When I am weak, then I am strong."*

That the swamp—the place of weakness, brokenness, and desperation—is exactly where transformation happens.

## **The Songs as Spiritual Markers**

Each chapter centers on a song.

These aren't illustrations of the teaching—they're the heart of it. Each song was written in a specific season, in a specific struggle, and became a waypoint on the journey. The book is the story behind the songs. The songs are the soundtrack of healing.

When you reach each chapter, I'll invite you to listen first, read second. Let the music do what music does—bypass your defenses and touch the ache directly. Then we'll unpack it together.

The ancient Psalms taught me this. They're not theological treatises set to music. They're prayers that became songs. Laments that became worship. Honest cries that became sacred text.

David didn't write about crying out in the cave. He cried out, and that cry became a psalm.

These fourteen songs are my psalms: imperfect, incomplete, but honest.

And honesty is where healing begins.

## **Key Truth: Love in the Muck**

### **A Word About "Scandal"**

When I say love is "scandalous," I mean it operates on principles that violate the economy we know—earning, deserving, performing, paying back.

In every system humans create, love has conditions. But real love says: "I love you covered in swamp mud. I forgive you before you've proven



you've changed. I call you 'beloved' when you're still a mess."

This is offensive to our sense of fairness. That's the scandal. Love isn't just nice—it's revolutionary.

If you could earn it, it wouldn't be free. If you deserved it, it wouldn't be love. If you had to clean up first, it wouldn't be scandalous—it would be sensible.

But love doesn't do sensible. Love does scandalous. Because if love only came to the deserving, you and I would still be in the swamp.

Here's the scandalous truth that changes everything:

**Love doesn't wait for you to clean up. It wades into the muck with you.**

And here's the scandal: it calls that muck 'holy ground.' Because anywhere you finally meet your true self IS holy ground—swamp mud and all.

Remember the ancient story of Moses at the burning bush? The voice said, *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."*

Moses was standing in the wilderness. Tending sheep. Running from his past. Not in a temple. Not in a place of worship. In the wilderness.

And the voice said: This is holy ground.

The swamp becomes holy ground when you meet truth there.

Not because the swamp is good. But because honesty enters it. And wherever honesty is becomes sacred.

An ancient truth captures this: *"Love shows itself in this: While we were still broken, restoration came for us."*

While we were still.

Not after we cleaned up. Not once we got our act together. Not when we finally believed hard enough.

**While we were still.**

In the swamp. In the muck. In the middle of our mess.

## **The Wayfarer Identity**

So who is a wayfarer? Someone on a journey, often weary. Not someone who has arrived, but someone honest enough to admit they're still on the road.

Wayfarers know: the road is long and we're not there yet. We'll walk through swamps and dark valleys. We don't travel alone. The point isn't arrival—it's learning to walk authentically. Questions are allowed, doubt is part of the journey.

The spiritual life is not about success but faithfulness. Not about never falling, but getting back up. Not about perfection, but direction.

## **Closing Image: The Traveler at the Trailhead**

Picture a traveler at the beginning of a long road.

Pack on their back. Mud on their boots. Questions in their hearts.

They don't know exactly where the road leads. They don't know how long it will take. They don't know what they'll encounter along the way.

But they know two things:

1. They can't stay in the swamp.
2. They don't have to walk alone.

An ancient seeker, reflecting on his own journey from the swamp to wholeness, wrote these now-famous words:

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." — Augustine of Hippo, Confessions*

That restlessness is mercy.

It's your soul refusing to settle for substitutes, calling you out of the swamp and onto the road.

So we begin.

Not with answers, but with honesty. Not with arrival, but with willingness to walk.

The journey is long.

But love is real.

And the Wayfarer's Anthem is this: **I can't do this alone. But I don't have to.**

Let's walk together.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Movement 1)

## MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

*"Love is closest to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." — Ancient wisdom*

The swamp is where honesty begins.

For too long, we've been taught that strength means pretending everything is fine. That integrity means wearing our best face and smiling through the pain. That acceptance is for people who've cleaned themselves up just enough to deserve it.

The swamp says: no more.

The swamp is where we finally stop performing. Where we sink to our knees in the muck and admit: I'm not okay. I'm not strong. I'm not sure I even know what I believe anymore. I'm drowning, and I don't know how to save myself.

And here's the mystery: this is exactly where healing meets us.

Not in the polished conference room. Not in the perfectly curated social media post. Not in the moment we finally get our act together.

Love meets us in the swamp.

The ancient people knew the swamp—generations of oppression and bondage. David knew it—hiding in caves, running from enemies, writing poems of lament. Job knew it—loss, broken body, friends who offered platitudes instead of presence. Jonah knew it—literal fish belly, running from truth, discovering that you can't outrun what's real.

The swamp is not the enemy. The swamp is where pretending dies so that truth can live.

## **What This Movement Is About**

Movement 1 is the movement of crisis. Of honesty. Of desperation that finally becomes prayer.

This isn't the "fix yourself" movement. This isn't the "seven steps to breakthrough" movement. This is the falling-on-your-face, crying-for-help, finally-admitting-you-can't-do-this-alone movement.

And here's what makes the swamp sacred: it's the only place where real healing can begin.

Because you can't heal what you won't name. You can't receive help if you're still pretending you don't need it. You can't be rescued if you're still convinced you can save yourself.

The swamp forces the question: Will you keep performing, or will you get honest?

Most of us spend years—sometimes decades—avoiding the swamp. We build platforms above it. We construct elaborate systems to keep us from sinking. We wear masks that say "I'm fine" while drowning inside.

But eventually, the platform collapses. The systems fail. The mask cracks.

And we find ourselves here. Knees in the muck. Water rising. No way to pretend anymore.

**This is where the journey begins.**

## **The Shift: From Performance to Honesty**

The swamp is where pretending ends. Not because you want it to end, but because you can't maintain it anymore. The weight of pretending has become heavier than the risk of being honest.

This movement is about shifting from "I have to look okay" to "I need help." From "I can handle this" to "I'm drowning." From "Let me work harder" to "God, if You're real, I need You."

That shift feels like failure. But it's actually the beginning of everything. You have to sink before you can stand on something other than your own strength. You have to admit you're drowning before you can receive rescue.

Weakness isn't the obstacle to rescue. Weakness is the prerequisite.

## **What You'll Discover in the Swamp**

These four chapters will take you through the essential movements of crisis and honesty:

You'll learn to **name where you are** without sugarcoating it. The swamp is real. Your struggle is real. The exhaustion, the shame, the fear—all real. And naming it honestly is the first act of courage.

You'll learn to **pray without pretense**. Not the eloquent prayers you think you should pray, but the raw, desperate, honest cries that actually connect with what's Real. "Help" is a complete prayer. "I can't do this" is a complete prayer. "If You're there, I need You" is a complete prayer.

You'll learn to **make the decision** that changes everything. You can't stay in the swamp forever. At some point, you have to choose: Will I accept the help being offered, or will I keep insisting I can save myself?

You'll learn that **something has to die** before something new can live. The false self. The illusions of control. The belief that you can manage

your own redemption. Death is terrifying. But it's also the doorway to resurrection.

This won't be comfortable. The swamp never is.

But it will be honest. And honest is the language healing speaks.

### **The Journey Through the Swamp:**

**Chapter 1: My Swamp** - You recognize where you are. Stuck. Sinking. No longer able to pretend you're okay. This is the moment of brutal honesty: naming the swamp for what it is.

I Will Rise

**Chapter 2: But Then I Prayed** - In your desperation, you cry out. Not eloquent words—raw, honest, desperate words. And you discover that honest conversation with yourself, with the universe, with whatever you call the Divine—that's the language of authentic relationship.

But Then I Prayed

**Chapter 3: STOP!!! And Make a Decision** - You reach the crossroads. You can't stay in the swamp forever. Healing is offered, but it must be received. You have to choose: the swamp or the water's edge.

STOP!! And Make a Decision

**Chapter 4: Dying Changes Everything** - Something has to die. The false self. The illusions. The control. Death feels like the end, but it's actually the beginning. Before resurrection, there must be a tomb.

Dying Changes Everything

These four chapters don't offer quick fixes. They offer solidarity. They say: you're not alone in the swamp. You're not the first to sink. And somehow—mysteriously, miraculously—the swamp is where the journey toward healing begins.

## **Entering This Movement**

Before you begin, take a moment. **Where is your swamp?** The actual place where you're stuck right now. Name it. Be specific.

**What are you afraid to admit?** If you could be completely honest, what would you say? Practice saying it: "I'm not okay."



# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 1)

## MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

### Chapter 1: My Swamp

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." — Augustine, Confessions*

I Will Rise



*Scan to listen: I Will Rise*

This chapter is about the swamp—that stuck place where you've been living. It's going to name some hard truths. And it's going to ask you to consider that the restlessness you feel might be more than random. Might be something, or Someone, calling to you.

You don't have to believe it yet. Just keep reading.

You know you're in the swamp when you start defending it.

When someone asks if you're okay and you snap back, "I'm fine."  
When a friend gently suggests you might need help and you list all the

reasons why your situation is different, more complicated, not what it looks like from the outside. When you catch yourself explaining why you have to stay—why leaving isn't an option, why this is just how life is, why everyone else simply doesn't understand.

The swamp doesn't announce itself with a sign. It's not marked on any map. You don't wake up one day and think, "Ah yes, I've arrived at my personal hell." It creeps in. A compromise here. A numbing behavior there. A toxic relationship you've learned to navigate. A performance you maintain because it's easier than being honest. A shame you carry that's become so familiar you can't imagine living without its weight.

And here's what makes the swamp so dangerous: you get functional in it. You learn to breathe the toxic air. You figure out where to step to avoid sinking deeper. You develop a routine, a rhythm, a way of existing that looks normal from the outside while you're dying on the inside.

This chapter is about the moment you stop defending and start seeing. When the explanations fall away and you're left with the raw truth: this place was never meant to sustain life. And you can't keep pretending it does.

The writing that follows came from my moment of seeing. Not in a flash of revelation, but in a slow, painful recognition that I'd built a life in a place that was killing me. And the first step toward freedom wasn't a grand gesture—it was simply admitting the truth: This is my swamp. And I'm drowning in it.

## **Key Themes**

### **1. The Geography of Disconnection**

The swamp is where connection dies. From yourself. From others. From what's real and true. In the swamp, you stop asking if you're loved and start wondering if you're even lovable. You stop reaching out and start shutting down.

Brené Brown, whose research has explored human connection for decades, puts it this way:

*"Connection is why we're here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. The power of connection and the fear of disconnection have driven human behavior since the beginning of time." — Brené Brown, Daring Greatly*

Connection is oxygen for the soul. Cut it off long enough, and something inside you begins to suffocate.

That's what the swamp does—it suffocates connection. And without connection, you slowly die inside.

Let's be honest about what the swamp actually is:

Dark water, murky and opaque. You can't see the way out. The muck clings to you, pulls at you. Everything feels heavy—your clothes, your limbs, your thoughts. And you can taste it in the back of your throat. Bitter. Like swallowing failure.

This isn't just depression (though it might be that too). This is years of performing instead of being. Conversations that ricochet off walls. Connection that feels like clocking in. Community that tastes like judgment. Meaning that stopped being a gift and became a weight you can't carry anymore.

## **2. The Abyss Within**

Ever feel like there's a bottomless hole inside you? Like no matter what you achieve, acquire, or accomplish, it's never enough?

One writer, reflecting on what truly sustains us in dark times, wrote:

*"When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or*

*cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand." — Henri Nouwen, Out of Solitude*

This is what the swamp teaches us: we don't need people to fix us. We need people to sit with us. To acknowledge the ache. To stop pretending they have all the answers and simply be present to the pain.

There's an ancient song—thousands of years old—that gives voice to this experience. It's the only one that begins and ends in darkness:

*"I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death... You have thrown me into the lowest pit, into the darkest depths... Why do you turn your face from me?... Darkness is my closest friend." — Psalm 88 (NLT)*

The song never resolves. It ends with "darkness is my closest friend." No neat bow. No triumphant turnaround. Just brutal honesty.

Sometimes lament without resolution IS the truth. Sometimes darkness IS the companion.

### **3. The Death of the Impostor**

Brennan Manning gave a name to this in *Abba's Child*:

*"The impostor is the false self shaped by others' expectations rather than authentic inner promptings. The impostor thrives in places that reward the compliant, the performing, the image-maintaining. The impostor whispers: 'If they knew the real you—the doubting, struggling, messy you—they'd reject you.' So you hide. You perform. You maintain the image. And you die inside while looking alive outside." — Brennan Manning, Abba's Child*

The impostor.

That was me. Not a liar, exactly. Just a performer. Shaped by what others expected. Driven by the hunger for approval. Terrified of being truly known.

I was the leader who felt nothing. The mentor dispensing advice I didn't believe. The person wielding wisdom like props while drowning in doubt.

*Pause and consider: Who is your impostor? What mask are you wearing?*

There's an ancient teaching that flips this whole performance thing on its head:

*"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him... God blesses those who mourn... God blesses those who are humble... God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice..." — Matthew 5:3-6 (NLT)*

Translation: blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, the honest grievors, the powerless, the desperate.

The swamp is where the impostor dies.

#### **4. Why We Stay Stuck**

I stayed stuck for reasons I barely admitted to myself.

Fear whispers: *What if you cry for help and no one answers? Better the swamp you know than the silence you don't.*

Shame whispers: *Functional people don't feel like this. If they knew the real you, they'd be horrified.*

Exhaustion whispers: *You're too tired to move. The swamp is killing you, but at least it's predictable.*

Identity whispers: *If you're not the strong one, the competent one, the leader—who are you?*

One spiritual teacher explains why the swamp is so exhausting:

*"We cannot transform ourselves. We cannot make ourselves into the people we need to be. Every self-help program, every technique, every discipline—pursued as self-salvation—will fail. Not because the practices are bad, but because we're asking them to do something they cannot do: save us. Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. You cannot earn transformation by trying harder. But you can position yourself where transformation happens." — Dallas Willard, The Great Omission*

Here's the swamp's hidden curriculum: the self-salvation project is a lie.

I'd been trying to transform myself—more discipline, more service, more belief, more performance. I was exhausted because I was demanding from effort what only surrender can deliver.

## **5. The Soul's Restless Hunger**

Ever feel like nothing satisfies? Like you keep searching for something but you don't even know what it is?

An ancient writer, sixteen hundred years ago, described it perfectly:

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. I carried my shattered self through streets and squares looking for something to fill the void. I tried honor, I tried pleasure, I tried philosophy, I tried religion. I threw myself into each with desperate intensity, hoping it would finally satisfy. But nothing did. Nothing could..."*

*The restlessness is a mercy. It's the soul refusing to settle for substitutes." — Augustine of Hippo, Confessions*

The swamp is full of this gnawing ache—nothing works anymore. Not willpower. Not achievement. Not service.

But what if that restlessness is actually healthy? What if your soul is refusing to settle for worthless substitutes?

## **6. The First Cry for Help**

"If there's anything real out there—I can't do this anymore."

Not eloquent. Not sophisticated. But honest. And honesty—raw, desperate, unvarnished honesty—is the native language of transformation.

This is authenticity stripped to bone: *I can't. Help.*

Richard Rohr, in *Falling Upward*, talks about two kinds of suffering: necessary suffering and unnecessary suffering.

Unnecessary suffering is when you fight reality, blame others, stay in victimhood, and refuse to let the pain teach you. It's suffering that embitters rather than transforms.

Necessary suffering is when you enter the pain consciously, asking 'What is this teaching me? How is this changing me? Where is truth in this?'

The same suffering can be either necessary or unnecessary. The difference isn't the suffering itself; it's how you engage it. Necessary suffering breaks you open. And that breaking is grace, because only the broken can be filled.

The cry for help—I *can't do this anymore*—marks the shift from unnecessary to necessary suffering.

You stop fighting reality and start asking what it's trying to teach you.

## The Core Truth

Here's where I need to be straight with you about something from scripture.

There's a letter written two thousand years ago that gets quoted a lot, but usually just one line: "While we were still broken, love died for us."

But here's the full passage, and it matters:

*"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son." — Romans 5:6-10 (NLT)*

Four words describe where we were when love came: powerless, lost, broken, opposed.

That's the swamp. No ability to save yourself (powerless). No spiritual credentials (lost). Failing morally and spiritually (broken). Actively opposed to truth (enemies).

The text doesn't soften it. It names it. And then drops the bomb: WHILE we were still in that state—love came for us.



Not after we cleaned up. Not once we got our act together. Not when we finally mustered enough strength.

**While we were still.**

Swamp-dwellers. Muck-covered. Mid-mess.

This is why scripture is different from any other approach. It doesn't start with "get yourself together first." It starts with "you can't, and that's exactly when love shows up."

This is the scandal:

*"Now what was the sort of 'hole' man had got himself into? He had tried to set up on his own, to behave as if he belonged to himself. In other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realising that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—that is the only way out of a 'hole.'" — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity*

Here is the scandal and the glory: Love comes to you in the muck. Not after you've cleaned yourself up. Not once you've proven yourself worthy. In the muck. While you're still a rebel. While you're still in the swamp. That's where healing finds you.

Here's the swamp's hidden gift: it forces surrender. I'd tried everything else—more discipline, more service, more belief, more performance, even more "morality" (being good). Nothing worked. So I did the only thing left: I laid down my arms.

And here's the glory: that's exactly when healing shows up. Not after you've cleaned yourself up. In the muck. Mid-swamp. While you're still broken and messy and desperate.

There's an ancient song—a testimony from someone who'd been exactly where you are—that captures this perfectly:

*"I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along." — Psalm 40:1-2 (NLT)*

*Out of the slimy pit. Out of the mud and mire.*

That's the swamp. And the promise isn't that you have to climb out yourself. The promise is that God reaches down into the muck and lifts you out.

Burned out. Swamp-stuck. Performance-exhausted.

And the promise is this: He hears the cry. He lifts us out.

And I will give you rest.

## The Wayfarer Moment

**Admitting "I'm not okay" is the doorway to healing. The swamp is where pretending goes to die.**

For years, I'd been pretending. Performing. Image-maintaining. And it was soul-crushing. Exhausting. Unsustainable.

The swamp strips away performance. When you're drowning, you stop caring about optics. You just want oxygen.

And that's exactly where healing begins.

It feels like death.

It's the doorway.

## Song Integration

"I Will Rise" emerged from this chapter's core truth: the move from swamp to freedom is not self-rescue, but God-dependent hope. The song expresses the paradox at the center of spiritual transformation—we are utterly powerless to save ourselves, yet called to actively respond to grace.

The opening verse names the impostor self with unflinching honesty: *"I built these walls, I learned to fight, kept my heart locked up so tight... But I've been sinking all the while."* This is the lament of someone who has maintained appearances while drowning inside. The song begins where transformation always begins—in truthful self-assessment, not pretense. Like the psalms of lament, it refuses to sugarcoat reality. God meets us in our honesty, not in our performance.

## Lyrics: I Will Rise

### [Verse 1]

I built these walls, I learned to fight,  
Kept my heart locked up so tight.  
Hid my fear behind a smile,  
But I've been sinking all the while.

### [Chorus]

I won't stay where shadows grow,  
Where my heart turns cold, where the dark winds blow,  
I'm stepping out, I'm choosing life,  
Leaving the swamp for the morning light.  
Oh, I will rise... I will rise.

### [Outro]

I see the road, I see the dawn,

And though I shake, I'll carry on.  
No more hiding, no more chains,  
Your grace is stronger than my pain!

## Key Takeaways

- **Honesty is the doorway to healing.** You can't heal what you won't name. Stop defending the swamp and start seeing it for what it truly is—a place of disconnection and slow death.
- **Performance exhausts; authenticity frees.** The impostor self keeps you trapped in endless striving. Grace meets you as you are, not as you pretend to be.
- **Your restlessness is a mercy.** The deep thirst you feel isn't a flaw—it's your soul refusing to settle for substitutes and pointing you toward the living water you actually need.
- **Powerlessness is the prerequisite for grace.** God doesn't wait for you to clean up or prove yourself worthy. He reaches into the muck while you're still broken and says, "Come as you are."

## Reflections for the Road

### Questions for the Journey:

#### 1. What is your swamp?

Not metaphorically. Specifically. Where are you stuck? What patterns have you normalized? What pain have you learned to live with?

Name it. Out loud if you can. In writing if you must. But name it.

#### 2. How long have you been defending your swamp?

What explanations do you give? What justifications? "It's not that bad." "Everyone struggles." "I'm handling it."

What would happen if you stopped defending and started being honest?

What identity would you lose? What image would crack? What expectations would you fail to meet?

**3. Who knows the real you—the swamp-dwelling, muck-covered, struggling you?**

The impostor thrives in isolation. Authenticity requires witness.

## **Closing Image**

You're still in the swamp. Let's be honest. This isn't the rescue chapter. This is the honesty chapter. The naming chapter. The cry-for-help chapter.

The swamp hasn't vanished. You're still stuck. Feet still in muck. Water still murky. Way out still unclear.

But something shifted.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 2)

## MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

### Chapter 2: But Then I Prayed

*"I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy." — Psalm 142:1*

But Then I Prayed

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylerthomas.com/sw12s8>



*Scan to listen: But Then I Prayed*

### An Invitation to Consider

What if that stirring in the middle of the night isn't just anxiety or restlessness?

What if the God of the Universe—the God who created you—has been calling to you? Not with demands. Not with conditions. Just calling.

Wanting to hear from you. Wanting to speak to you.

**If you're still here, consider it might not be an accident or coincidental.**

Now what?

This chapter is about what happens when you finally run out of options. When you've tried everything and nothing works. When self-sufficiency collapses and you reach out—not with polished words, but with honest cries.

You might not call it prayer. Maybe you've never prayed before. Maybe prayer feels too religious, too formal, too... much.

That's okay. Because what I'm talking about isn't religious performance. It's honest conversation with whatever is Real, whatever is greater than yourself.

And if you're willing to consider that "whatever" might actually be Someone—that changes everything.

Keep reading.

Here's the pattern most of us follow when life falls apart:

First, we try to fix it ourselves. We strategize, problem-solve, work harder. We're competent—we've handled crises before.

When that doesn't work, we try to manage it. We numb the pain, stay busy, medicate with work (or substances), Netflix, food, scrolling—whatever keeps the darkness at bay.

When that stops working, we start bargaining. *If I just... If they would... If this changes...* Desperate negotiations from a position of no power.

And finally—only finally—when we've exhausted every other option, when we're flat on our backs with nothing left, we reach out. Not the polished words we learned growing up, but the raw, honest cries that are barely more than groans: "Help."

This chapter is about that moment. When self-sufficiency collapses. When all our strategies fail. When we run out of moves and discover that running out of moves was the point all along.

Because reaching out isn't the last resort when everything else fails. It's the first reality we keep trying to avoid: we need help more than we need solutions.

The writing that follows came from a season when I learned to speak honestly instead of performing politely. When "But then I prayed" became the turning point in every valley I walked through.

Prayer—conversation with the Divine, with your deepest self, with what's Real—in the swamp doesn't look like prayer on the mountaintop (or in a flashy church setting). Mountaintop prayer is full of gratitude and joy, hands raised, voice strong. Swamp prayer is different.

Swamp prayer is:

- Groaning when words won't come: "And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words" (Romans 8:26, NLT)
- Crying out instead of composing: "I cry out to the LORD; I plead for the LORD's mercy" (Psalm 142:1, NLT)
- Complaining honestly instead of pretending piously: "O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way?" (Psalm 13:1, NLT)
- Questioning reality instead of defending platitudes: "LORD, why do the wicked prosper? Why are evil people so happy?" (Jeremiah 12:1, NLT)

In the swamp, you learn that honest conversation isn't about saying the right things. It's about saying the real things.



Henri Nouwen reflects on the prodigal son:

*"The prodigal son's confession—'Father, I have sinned'—came not from a place of spiritual maturity but from the pigpen, from desperation, from coming to his senses in the midst of ruin." — Henri Nouwen, The Return of the Prodigal Son*

This is swamp prayer: painfully, uncomfortably, refreshingly honest.

No spiritual jargon. No performance. No pretending everything's fine when it's not. Just raw human beings crying out from the depths of their need.

And here's the scandalous truth: this kind of honesty is what healing prefers. Because honest conversation—even angry, doubting, or desperate—is still connection. Performance is isolation.

## Key Themes

### 1. The Collapse of Self-Sufficiency

There's a moment in every swamp journey when you hit the wall: *I can't fix this.*

Not "I don't want to fix this." Not "I shouldn't have to fix this." But the deeper, darker admission: *I am incapable. I am insufficient. I am out of moves.*

Terrifying, especially if you're the one who always finds a way. The problem-solver. The strong one. The one others lean on. You've built your identity on competence, on handling it, on never letting them see you sweat.

And now you're drenched. You can't handle it. The problems won't yield to your strategies.

For me, it was the moment I realized: I couldn't think my way out. Couldn't work my way out. Couldn't perform my way out. I'd exhausted my toolkit. Every tool broken. And the avalanche was still descending while I stood frozen.

*"The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now." — Henri Nouwen, Life of the Beloved*

This is the swamp's paradox: it's not where the Divine is absent. It's where we finally stop pretending we don't need help.

Nouwen spent years at Harvard delivering polished lectures on spirituality. But it was only when he left academia to serve people with intellectual disabilities at L'Arche that he learned what he'd been teaching. In the mess. In the vulnerability. In the daily grind of caring for those the world deemed "broken," he discovered: healing meets us not in our competence but in our need.

The swamp isn't punishment. It's invitation.

When self-sufficiency collapses, we're faced with a choice: do we reach out, or do we keep trying to manage on our own? The nature of how we reach out reveals everything.

## **2. Reaching Out as Surrender, Not Strategy**

Here's what we get wrong: The religious treat prayer like a vending machine. Insert the right words, push the right button (faith! persistence! positive thinking!), and out pops the answer we want.

But swamp prayer isn't strategy. It's surrender.

Not: "God, here's my five-point plan—please bless it."

There's a canyon-wide difference between asking *for help to accomplish our will* and asking *for the wisdom to see what's truly*

*needed.*

The first keeps us in the director's chair. We're still writing the script; we just need assistance.

The second surrenders the pen. We acknowledge the script might look different from ours—and we're willing to trust it anyway.

Jesus models this in Gethsemane:

*"He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.'" — Luke 22:41-42 (NLT)*

Jesus wasn't in a swamp—he was sinless, facing something we could never face. But here he models the kind of prayer that's gut-wrenchingly honest to the bone. It's the kind of prayer we need when we're in our swamp:

"Father, I want this cup to pass. I'm being honest about that. But I trust You more than I trust my own desires. So I yield."

This is swamp prayer: not manipulating the universe, but yielding to what's real. Not demanding answers, but trusting the process.

Richard Foster writes:

*"Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love." — Richard Foster, Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*

When we see prayer as a burden, a duty, something we have to grit our teeth to accomplish, we've missed the point entirely. Prayer is not about spiritual calisthenics or religious performance. It's about relationship. It's about learning to notice presence, to recognize truth, to trust process. The Three R's framework helps us shift from trying harder to loving deeper—from striving to abiding.

This kind of surrender—not manipulation but yielding—creates the turning point every swamp story needs. It's the moment everything changes.

### **3. The Turning Point: "But Then I Prayed"**

Every swamp story has a hinge. The moment despair meets hope. When resignation shifts to surrender. When the drowning person looks up.

The phrase "but then I prayed" marks that hinge.

*I was drowning in anxiety... but then I reached out.*

*I was overwhelmed by grief... but then I spoke it.*

*I was consumed by fear... but then I asked for help.*

*I was paralyzed by shame... but then I told the truth.*

The circumstances don't immediately change. The storm doesn't instantly calm. The problem doesn't magically resolve.

But **you** change. The moment you stop bearing it alone and bring it into the light—even if that light is just your own honest acknowledgment—power shifts.

You're no longer drowning silently. You're crying out. And crying out is the first act of defiance against the swamp.

*Pause and consider: When was the last time you reached out—really reached out—for help?*

But what does this kind of honest prayer actually sound like? How do we move beyond polished words to real conversation with God? The ancient practice of lament shows us the way.

### **4. The Language of Lament**

Western culture has lost the art of lament. We're taught to be positive, to think optimistically, to "choose joy." All good things—until they're not. Until life is genuinely hard and those platitudes feel like betrayal.

The ancient Hebrew poets knew better. Nearly a third of the Psalms are laments—raw, honest, sometimes angry prayers that bring pain directly before the Divine without sugarcoating it.

*"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief." — Psalm 22:1-2 (NLT)*

That's in the sacred texts. No apology. No caveat. Just honest anguish.

Lament says: *This is not okay. This hurts. And I'm bringing that hurt into the presence of love instead of pretending it doesn't exist.*

Brené Brown writes:

*"Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage." — Brené Brown, Daring Greatly*

Lament is vulnerability. It's the courage to name the pain instead of numbing it. To cry out instead of shutting down.

And here's what the swamp teaches: **God doesn't wait for us to clean up before drawing near. Love is closest to the brokenhearted. It saves the crushed in spirit.**

Not those who have it together. Not those who've earned it. Not those who speak perfectly.

The broken. The crushed. The desperate.

This is the scandal: Love doesn't wait for strength. It comes when we're weak. It doesn't seek the healthy; it comes to the sick.

*"To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God." — Timothy Keller, The Meaning of Marriage*

This is what prayer from the swamp offers: the chance to be fully known—muck and all—and discover you're still loved. We come to prayer not hiding our mess, but exposing it. Not pretending we have it together, but admitting we're falling apart. And that's exactly where love meets us.

*"And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words." — Romans 8:26 (NLT)*

Even when we don't know how to pray, the Spirit prays for us. Our groaning is enough. Our tears are enough. Our whispered "help" is enough.

Prayer isn't about eloquence. It's about honesty. And life itself translates our weakness into meaning.

## The Wayfarer Moment

**Prayer isn't about having the right words. It's about bringing our real selves—broken, desperate, honest—to whatever we call Real.**

For so long, I thought I had to pray the "right" way. Thought the universe was listening for spiritual maturity, unwavering faith, positive thinking. So I prayed prayers I thought were acceptable, not prayers

that expressed what I actually felt.

Those prayers bounced off the ceiling.

But when I finally stopped performing and started being real—when I prayed the ugly prayers, the doubting prayers, the angry prayers, the desperate prayers—something shifted.

*"We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us." — C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

And when we do, we discover something astonishing: this is the conversation that's been waiting all along.

## Song Integration

"But Then I Prayed" captures the theological truth at the heart of this chapter: prayer is not religious performance but radical vulnerability before God. The phrase "but then" functions as the hinge between two realities—our powerlessness and God's presence. This is not a magical formula but a relational turning point, the moment when we stop bearing our burdens alone and invite Presence into our panic.

The chapter teaches that honest prayer trumps perfect prayer, and this song embodies what that honesty sounds like. The opening verse names the spiritual warfare of the swamp: *"The night was long, the weight was strong, the shadows whispered, 'You don't belong.'"* These whispers aren't merely self-doubt but the voice of the accuser. To name this darkness in prayer is to drag it into the light where its power diminishes. Like Psalm 22's "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"—this is honest anguish without apology.

## Lyrics: But Then I Prayed

**[Verse 1]**

The night was long, the weight was strong,  
The shadows whispered, "You don't belong."  
I felt the fear, the dark surround,  
No light, no hope, no solid ground.

**[Chorus]**

But then I prayed, and You were near,  
Your voice of love cast out my fear.  
Your mercy came, Your grace remained,  
The chains were gone—You healed my pain.  
But then I prayed, but then I prayed.

**[Outro]**

Mountains move, and waters part,  
Your power reaches every heart.  
When all seems lost, when hope is faint,  
Your name alone sustains the saints.  
I called to You, and You replied,  
Your love restored my life inside.

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Honest prayer trumps perfect prayer.** God doesn't need your eloquence—He wants your reality. Raw, messy, doubting prayers connect more deeply than polished performances.
- **Lament is a legitimate form of prayer.** Bringing your pain, anger, and confusion directly before God without sugarcoating is biblical faith, not lack of faith.



- **Prayer is surrender, not strategy.** Stop trying to manipulate outcomes and start yielding to a larger reality. "Not my will, but Yours" is the prayer that changes everything.

- **Presence changes the equation.** When you cry out, you discover you're not alone in the swamp. God doesn't always remove the trial immediately, but He never leaves you to face it alone.

## Reflections for the Road

### 1. When do you typically turn to prayer—first or last?

Be honest. Do you reach out when life is smooth, or only when you've exhausted every other option?

What would it look like to make honest conversation your first response instead of your last resort?

### 2. What does your "prayer voice" sound like?

Is it formal? Polished? Theological? Or is it raw, honest, unfiltered?

What would change if you prayed like you talk to your closest friend—without editing, without performing, without pretending?

### 3. Read Psalm 13 or Psalm 22 slowly.

Notice how the psalmist starts with raw complaint—"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?"—and moves toward trust. Lament doesn't have to end in despair; it can end in surrender.

Can you pray like this—starting with brutal honesty and ending with trust, even when your circumstances haven't changed?

## Closing Image

You're still in the swamp. Water still dark. Way out still unclear. But you've cried out. And discovered something profound: you're not alone.

Presence is here. In the muck. In the mess. Mid-desperation.

It's not waiting for you to clean up before it comes close. It's close to the brokenhearted. It saves the crushed in spirit.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 3)

## MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

### Chapter 3: STOP!! And Make a Decision

*"I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live." — Deuteronomy 30:19*

STOP!! And Make a Decision

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylerthomas.com/8vYOR0>



*Scan to listen: STOP!! And Make a Decision*

### An Invitation to Consider

Maybe you even whispered that prayer: *"Yes, God. I want to listen."*

What if I told you that even your doubt can be part of the prayer? What if you could say to God:

*"God, I'm not sure I believe all this. Help me with my unbelief. I'm ready to start listening to Your advice for my life. I want to leave this*

*swamp, but I don't know how. Help me. I'm opening myself up to making a decision to continue this journey of discovery."*

**You've cried out for help. Now what?**

Let me tell you what I wish someone had told me years earlier:

You can't heal what you won't name. You can't leave where you won't admit you're stuck. And you can't change direction until you first stop moving in the wrong one.

You've spent long enough analyzing the swamp. Understanding how you got there. Processing the pain. Talking about it with your therapist, your support group, your journal. And all of that has value—real value. Self-awareness is important.

But at some point, awareness has to lead to action. Understanding has to become decision. Knowledge has to translate into movement.

Because here's the uncomfortable truth: you can know everything about your swamp—its depth, its toxicity, how you ended up there, why you've stayed—and still die in it. Knowledge alone doesn't save you. Decision does.

This chapter breaks the pattern of the previous ones. It's urgent. Confrontational. The song is written in rap/spoken word because sometimes truth needs to interrupt, not soothe. Sometimes love sounds like "STOP!" not "it's okay."

If you've recognized your swamp (Chapter 1) and you've learned to speak honestly in it (Chapter 2), there's only one question left: What are you going to do about it?

Not tomorrow. Not when you feel ready. Not when you have all the answers figured out.

Now.

The writing that follows came from the moment my secrets were exposed and the people who loved me most said, "We're not going to watch you die. You have to choose... or we walk." It's about the crossroads we all reach eventually—the moment when staying put is no longer an option, and forward is the only way through.

You're at that crossroads now. And you have to choose.

Why now? Why can't you take your time, think it through, weigh all the options?

Because every day you don't choose healing, you're choosing something else:

- Choosing the swamp (familiar misery)
- Choosing control (exhausting illusion)
- Choosing performance (soul-crushing work)
- Choosing to stay stuck (slow death)

Not deciding feels like neutrality, but it isn't. It's still a decision—for the status quo. It's a decision to keep drowning.

## Key Themes

### 1. The Paralysis of Neutrality

C.S. Lewis dismantles the illusion:

*"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." — C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock*

Lewis forces the issue: you can't stay neutral about what matters most. Either Truth (with a capital T) is real, or it isn't. Either you choose

toward it, or you choose away from it.

Middle ground doesn't exist.

Same with the swamp. You can't stay indefinitely between drowning and swimming. Every day you don't choose to leave is a day you've chosen to stay.

Neutrality is a myth. Just another word for "status quo."

Even Dante recognized this in his *Inferno*:

*"These wretches, who were never truly alive... are mixed with that cowardly crew of angels... Heaven drove them out to keep its beauty from being marred; and the depths of Hell will not receive them." —  
Dante Alighieri, Inferno, Canto III*

The uncommitted, those who refused to choose, were rejected by both heaven and hell. They belonged nowhere because they stood for nothing.

Not deciding is still deciding. The question is: what are you deciding for?

He wants you. All of you. Now.

## **2. The Cost of Comfort**

Dallas Willard exposes why we resist decision-making:

*"The cautious faith that never saws off the limb on which it is sitting never learns that unattached limbs may find strange, unaccountable ways of not falling... The issue is not really one of risk. It is the issue of to whom we will risk ourselves... The greatest challenge you and I face today is not whether we can believe, but whether we can trust. Trust requires action. It requires that we stop merely wishing and start*

*walking."* — Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

Willard names our fear: we're not scared of making the wrong choice. We're scared of making any choice that requires letting go of control. We'd rather sit on the limb than saw it off and discover we'll be caught.

The swamp feels safer than the water because it's familiar. We know this pain. We've adapted to this misery. Leaving means risking the unknown—and that terrifies us more than slow death.

But Willard says: trust requires action. You can't trust theoretically. You have to actually step. Move. Choose.

Only in the choosing do you discover that reality "can be counted on."

The cost of comfort reveals why we resist making decisions in the first place. But when we finally do decide, we discover something profound: the decision itself is an act of faith.

### **3. Decision as Act of Faith**

Brennan Manning reframes decision-making as fundamentally spiritual:

*"My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it."* — Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

Define yourself radically as one beloved. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion.

When we stop pretending and start living as beloved, we make choices from a different foundation. We no longer choose based on fear of rejection or need for approval. We choose based on who we already are: loved, accepted, enough.

The decision to trust—to step out of the swamp and toward the water—is the ultimate act of faith. It says, 'I believe I'm loved. I

believe something good wants good for me. I believe there's a better way.'

Manning shifts the question from "What should I do?" to "Who am I?"

If your identity is "beloved," the decision becomes natural. You choose healing not because you've earned it, but because you're already worthy of it. You step toward the water not to prove yourself, but because you trust what's calling you.

The swamp keeps you stuck in the old identity: performer, failure, impostor.

*What if you're already loved, already enough, already worthy—right now, in the swamp?*

When we make the decision to trust—to step toward the water—we discover that the real transformation isn't about acquiring something new. It's about releasing what we've been clinging to.

#### **4. The Freedom of Letting Go**

Richard Rohr, in *Falling Upward*, describes what happens when we finally choose surrender:

*"True transformation happens not by acquiring something new, but by letting go of something old. The first half of life is about building the container; the second half is about filling it with actual contents—or, more commonly, emptying ourselves of the false contents." — Richard Rohr, Falling Upward*

Your greatest spiritual teachers are your failures. They break open the containers you spent the first half of life building. And in that brokenness, you discover what you actually need isn't more success, more control, more certainty—it's the freedom to be loved as you are.

The decision to stop, to make a choice, is often the decision to let go. Not to acquire. Not to achieve. But to release your grip on the swamp



and trust that the water will hold you.

Transformation happens through subtraction, not addition. You don't need more willpower. More strategy. More options.

You need to let go.

The decision this chapter proposes isn't "work harder." It's "release your grip."

Let go—and discover what you've been afraid of losing was never yours to keep.

## 5. The Two Paths

The road turns into a "Y" here. And you must choose.

This isn't a decision you can make gradually. You can't ease into it. You can't half-commit and see how it feels. The swamp or the water's edge. Staying or leaving. The false self or the real.

You're standing at the fork, and paralysis is just a slow yes to the swamp.

An ancient story captures this choice perfectly:

### The Crossroads

*"Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster... Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" — Deuteronomy 30:15, 19 (NLT)*

The choice isn't complicated. It's just hard.

The only question is: will you move?

## The Wayfarer Moment

**The decision to leave the swamp is terrifying—not because you don't know what to do, but because you do.**

For me, the hardest part wasn't figuring out the right choice. It was admitting I'd been making the wrong one.

For years.

The swamp wasn't happening to me. I was choosing it. Every day I stayed, I chose it again.

*"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." — Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning*

But you can control what you do next.

## Song Integration

The rap "STOP!! And Make a Decision" breaks the contemplative rhythm with prophetic urgency. This is not gentle invitation but loving confrontation—the voice of truth refusing to let us languish in analysis paralysis. The chapter teaches that neutrality is myth, and the song embodies that truth through aggressive tempo and relentless call to action. This is what love sounds like when it will not watch us die slowly in the comfort of indecision.

The opening command—"STOP!!"—is fierce mercy, echoing the prophetic tradition where God interrupts patterns leading to destruction: Nathan confronting David, Jesus overturning temple tables. Sometimes love must disrupt, must jolt us from comfortable numbness, must create crisis so decision becomes possible. This

interruption represents Bonhoeffer's "costly grace"—grace demanding everything, calling us to die to self and actually move. The song's aggressive format creates holy discomfort propelling us toward the crossroads where we must finally choose.

## Lyrics: Stop/Decide (The Rap)

### Key Takeaways

- **Neutrality is a myth.** Not deciding is still deciding—for the status quo, for the swamp, for slow death. Every day you don't choose healing, you're choosing something else.
- **Decision precedes feeling.** You don't wait until you feel ready, brave, or certain. You decide first, then courage follows. Faith moves before feelings catch up.
- **The crossroads demands a response.** You can't stay at the fork forever. Forward or back. Life or death. Water or swamp. Choose this day how you will live.
- **Letting go is an act of faith.** Transformation requires releasing your grip on control, certainty, and the familiar—trusting that grace will catch you when you step off your dead-end road.

### Reflections for the Road

#### 1. What decision have you been avoiding?

Name it. Out loud if you can.

#### 2. What's the cost of staying in the swamp?

What is it costing you today? This week? This year?

Write it down. Look at it.

Not a five-year plan. Not a complete transformation.

What would moving toward healing look like right now?

Seriously. What has to happen before you move?

What if those things only come after you move, not before?

## **Closing Image**

A foot raised. A breath held. The moment before the step.

The water's edge is ahead. Unknown. Uncertain. Terrifying in its promise.

And you stand at the crossroads.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 4)

## MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

### Chapter 4: Dying Changes Everything

*"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." — Galatians 2:20*

Dying Changes Everything

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylertthomas.com/7U8VKi>



*Scan to listen: Dying Changes Everything*

### An Invitation to Consider

You've named the swamp. You've prayed—even if it was just "Help."  
You've made a decision to keep walking this journey.

But here's what nobody tells you at the beginning: deciding to leave the swamp means something in you has to die.

Not physically. But the version of you that's been surviving in the muck. The coping mechanisms you've relied on. The false self you've

performed being. The illusions about how life works.

## Key Themes

### 1. Death as Transformation

Death in spiritual literature is rarely just biological cessation. It's transformation. Passage. Transition.

Here are the different kinds of death we experience:

- Death to the false self - the person we've performed being, not who we actually are
- Death to illusions - the stories we've told ourselves about how life should work
- Death to control - the grip we've held on outcomes, other people, our futures
- Death to the life we planned so we can live the life that's actually here

Dallas Willard says that transformation requires this kind of death:

*"The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence." — Dallas Willard, The Great Omission*

The death of my performance, the good and the bad, felt like the death of myself. I'd poured everything into it—my identity, my worth, my purpose. When it crumbled under the weight of my own moral failure, I didn't know who I was. Would I lose my family? Would I lose my

job? Would I lose my purpose?

My moral decay didn't just end a chapter of my life. It severed me from the community I'd grown so close to. The people who knew me, trusted me, looked to me—gone. Not because they abandoned me, but because my choices had consequences. Real, devastating, life-altering consequences. And greater, it threatened my marriage.

I remember the night I finally admitted it was over. The community I'd built. The reputation I'd cultivated. The leader I'd pretended to be.

All of it—dead.

But here's what I didn't understand then: God wasn't destroying me out of anger. Life was dismantling the false version of me I'd built. Killing the performer who wore my success like a costume. Killing my addiction to approval, to respect, to being seen as the "good" one.

The false self had to die so the true self could begin to live.

But what exactly has to die? What is it that transformation requires us to release? The answer is painful but freeing: the false self we've been performing has to go.

## **2. The Death of the False Self**

The false self is the person you've been pretending to be. The mask you wear. The performance you give. The image you maintain. Richard Rohr contrasts the true self (the person you were created to be, your authentic essence) with the false self (the person you think you need to be to survive, to be loved, to matter).

The false self is who we think we are—our mental self-image and social agreement, which most people spend their whole lives living up to or down to. It is all a fictional creation. The true self is who we objectively are from the beginning, in the deepest pattern of our being.

Richard Rohr writes:

*"There is nothing to prove and nothing to protect. I am who I am and it's enough." — Richard Rohr, Immortal Diamond*

The false self is built on:

- What people expect
- What earns approval
- What feels safe
- What maintains control

The false self says:

- "If people knew the real me, they'd reject me"
- "I have to perform to be loved"
- "Vulnerability is weakness"
- "I am what I accomplish"

Thomas Merton understood this deeply:

*"Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy." — Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation*

But you're not losing yourself. You're losing the prison you've been living in.



The False Self	The True Self
Performs for approval	Rests in acceptance
Fears exposure	Practices honesty
Hides weakness	Confesses need
Image-management	Authenticity
Exhausting	Life-giving

### 3. Dying to Control, Certainty, Performance

Control is one of the hardest things to surrender. We want to manage outcomes. Predict futures. Protect ourselves from pain.

Certainty is another. We want answers, not mysteries. Clear paths, not ambiguity. Solid ground, not shifting sand.

Performance is how we try to earn what life offers freely: acceptance, love, belonging.

All three have to die.

#### **Dying to Control:**

The death of control feels like freefall.

But it's not. It's falling into the arms of what's been holding you all along—the reality that you were never actually in control, and that's okay.

The spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now. All things—a glass of water, a walk in the woods, a chair, a table—are spiritual. To live a spiritual life means to fully claim our daily existence, right here in the freefall.

#### **Dying to Certainty:**

This is hard for many of us because we've been taught doubt is weakness.

But actually, clinging to certainty is the opposite of faith. Real trust requires living in the midst of mystery.

The death of false certainty opens space for a bigger, truer understanding of reality.

### **Dying to Performance:**

You can't earn love. You can't perform your way to acceptance. Every effort to prove yourself is just another attempt at self-justification that exhausts your soul.

Brennan Manning exposed this trap:

*"My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it." — Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel*

The impostor is the false self shaped by others' expectations. The death of the impostor is the beginning of life. We don't have to be smart, successful, or accomplished enough. We simply have to be real.

The death of performance means you stop. You rest. You receive. You let yourself be loved not because you're impressive, but because you're human.

Letting go of control, certainty, and performance creates space for something new. But there's a space between the death and the new life—a tomb we must enter before resurrection can come.

## **4. Why Resurrection Requires a Tomb**

You can't be raised unless you've died. You can't experience transformation unless you've been in the darkness.

Between death and resurrection, there's a tomb. Dark. Silent. Seemingly final. And most of us are terrified of that in-between space.

We want instant transformation: decision one moment, new life the next. We want to skip the tomb. But there's no resurrection without burial.

C.S. Lewis understood this paradox of death and life:

*"The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up your self, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in." — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity*

This is the hardest part: living in the tomb. You've let the old self die. The false identity is gone. The illusions are shattered. The performance has stopped.

But the new self hasn't emerged yet. You're in the darkness, waiting. And you don't know how long the darkness will last.

Most of us experience transformation this way: We've experienced death—of dreams, relationships, certainties, selves—and we're waiting in the tomb. We know about resurrection theoretically, but we're living in the tomb emotionally.

The darkness is part of the journey. You can't skip it. You can't rush it. You have to go through it.

But here's the promise: the tomb is not the end. It never was. It's the passage between who you were and who you're becoming.

*What version of yourself needs to die so your true self can emerge?*

## A Deeper Truth

All these stories—from Elizabeth Lesser to Jesus to Paul to Brené Brown—point to the same reality: transformation requires death. Not metaphorical "letting go" or positive thinking. Actual death of something that's been alive in you.

By now, you should be convinced that the God who created you has been calling you into a better way of living. That the voice you're hearing isn't just some made-up fantasy in your head.

You've named the swamp. You've prayed. Have you decided to keep taking the journey?

The question isn't whether you believe the spiritual language. The question is: **Are you ready to let the old version of you die so the real you can live?**

An ancient writer named Paul captured this in Galatians 2:20. Whether you take this literally or metaphorically, here's what it means for anyone in the swamp:

Unpack every phrase:

- **"My old self has been crucified with Christ"** - Something in you has already died. The old self, the false self, the ego-driven self—crucified.
- **"It is no longer I who live"** - The old you is no longer running the show. This isn't self-improvement. This is death and resurrection.

- **"But Christ lives in me"** - The resurrection. New life. Not self-generated. Christ-generated.
- **"So I live in this earthly body"** - Still human. Still here. Still embodied. But the source has changed.
- **"By trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"** - The foundation. Not your performance. Love itself. Radical sacrifice.

This kind of transformation isn't a once-for-all event that happens and never needs to happen again. The symbolic death in therapy, in recovery, in spiritual awakening—all of these point to an ongoing reality we live out across our entire lives. Each time we face a new swamp, a new layer of the impostor emerges that needs to die.

As we grow from childhood into adulthood, as we experience the complexities and harsh realities of life, we discover new layers of the false self that need to die. New illusions about reality that need to be shattered. New areas of control we must surrender.

The child who committed to change believed. The teenager questioned. The young adult faced new temptations. The adult confronted failure. The mature person learned to let go.

Each stage of life requires its own deaths, its own resurrections. We're not repeating the initial transformation—we're living into the fullness of what that transformation means, layer by layer, death by death, resurrection by resurrection.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**You can't be resurrected until you're willing to die. Transformation requires surrender of the self we've been protecting.**

This is the scariest wayfarer moment yet. Because death feels like loss. Like failure. Like the end.

But the wayfarer learns: Death is passage. The tomb isn't the end; it's the womb of new life. What feels like dying is actually being born.

Richard Rohr describes this transformative death:

I didn't want the old me to die. I liked him. He was successful. Respected. Put-together. Sure, he was exhausted and empty inside, but at least he looked good.

## Song Integration

"Dying Changes Everything" confronts us with the most paradoxical truth in spiritual transformation: we must die to live, lose ourselves to find ourselves, descend into the tomb before experiencing resurrection. The chapter teaches that transformation requires actual death of the false self, and the song gives voice to this terrifying yet liberating reality.

The chorus—"*Almost dying changes nothing, dying changes everything*"—crystallizes the chapter's core teaching. This distinction is theologically crucial. Almost dying is flirtation with transformation without commitment. It's touching the edge of surrender but pulling back, acknowledging what needs to die but refusing to let it actually expire. And as the song declares, this changes nothing. The chapter illustrates this through multiple frameworks: the death of the false self, the death of control, the death of performance-based identity. In each case, partial death is insufficient. The song's insistence on complete death echoes Paul's radical statement in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live." Not "I'm working on dying." Not "I'm mostly dead." But "I no longer live." This is total death, and only this kind makes resurrection possible.

This song serves as Movement One's climax because it names the hardest truth: transformation requires death—actual death of who we thought we were, what we thought we needed, how we thought life worked. And on the other side of that death, in the tomb, in the Saturday waiting, resurrection begins. The song doesn't rush past the tomb but honors the complete submersion, the staying dead to what needs to stay dead. Yet it also refuses to leave us there. "Dying changes everything" because death is not the end—it's passage, transformation, the doorway to life we couldn't access any other way.

## **Song: "Dying Changes Everything"**

### **Verse 1**

I'm sinking deep, the waters rising  
Lost inside this broken place  
Breathing in the weight of silence  
Drowning in my own disgrace  
My eyes grow dim, my strength is failing  
Shadows closing all around  
But in the stillness I hear whispers  
"Child, you will be found"

### **Pre-Chorus**

Tick tock... time fades out  
Love breaks through the doubt

### **Chorus**

Almost dying changes nothing  
Dying changes everything

I release the chains I'm clutching

Now I rise on healing's wings

Spirit lifts me from the waters

Breath of heaven fills my lungs

In surrender I discover

New life rising with the sun

**Verse 2**

The veil is torn, the light is breaking

A timeless moment has come

Flames of mercy burn around me

Pulling me toward wholeness' throne

Grace like lightning strikes my spirit

Love restores my heart again

No more running, no more hiding

I am free, I'm found again

**Pre-Chorus**

Tick tock... time fades out

Love breaks through the doubt

**Chorus (Big)**

Almost dying changes nothing

Dying changes everything

I release the chains I'm clutching



Now I rise on healing's wings  
Spirit lifts me from the waters  
Breath of heaven fills my lungs  
In surrender I discover  
New life rising with the sun

**Bridge (Build)**

I have crossed from death to life  
You're the fire, You're the light  
Nothing stands but love divine  
Dying changes everything  
*(Repeat as needed, rising each time)*

**Verse 3**

Now I stand, my chains are broken  
Every shadow swept away  
Hope is rising, truth has spoken  
Night has turned to brighter day  
I will sing of resurrection  
Testify to what love's done  
From the grave into its glory  
All my battles now are won

**Final Chorus / Tag**

Almost dying changes nothing

Dying changes everything

I am living in this presence

Breathing heaven's holy breath

**Outro (Soft, reflective)**

Heartbeat slows.

Tick... tock... time is gone

Eternal life has just begun

Love, You're my only song

Dying changed it all

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Almost dying changes nothing; dying changes everything.** Partial surrender keeps you in the swamp with a different view. Complete death to the false self is what resurrection requires.
- **The tomb is not the end—it's passage.** Saturday's darkness between death and resurrection is where trust is tested. You can't skip the waiting, but the waiting isn't wasted.
- **What dies stays dead.** Don't resuscitate old patterns, false identities, or survival mechanisms. Let what needs to die remain buried so new life can emerge.
- **You can't resurrect yourself.** Transformation isn't self-improvement—it's being made alive by God's power. Your job is to surrender; His job is to raise you.

## **Reflections for the Road**

These aren't homework. They're invitations. Gentle questions to help you engage with the deaths you're facing—or avoiding.

Take as much time as you need. Saturday can't be rushed. But it also can't be avoided.

### **1. What in you needs to die? Name it specifically.**

Not in general terms. Not "my issues" or "my brokenness." What specifically needs to die?

Maybe it's a relationship that's become toxic. Maybe it's a dream that's become an obsession. Maybe it's the version of yourself you've been clinging to—the capable one, the strong one, the one who has it all together.

Maybe it's your need to be right. Your need to control. Your need to perform.

### **2. What are you afraid of losing if it dies?**

Be brutally honest. Death feels like loss because it is loss. What will you lose if this thing dies?

Approval? Security? Identity? The future you planned? The person you thought you were?

Then ask: Is what I'm afraid of losing actually life? Or is it just familiar death?

### **3. What's your Saturday? Where are you stuck between death and resurrection?**

Maybe something has already died—a marriage, a career, a certainty, a self—and you're in the tomb. Between the death and whatever comes next.

Saturday is disorienting. You can't go back to Friday (that life is dead). You can't see Sunday yet (transformation is still hidden). You're just... waiting.

If you're in Saturday, name it. You're not stuck. You're in passage. The tomb is part of the journey.

## **Closing Image**

The tomb. Silent. Dark. Waiting.

You've died. Or something in you has died. Or something needs to die and you're finally letting it.

It doesn't feel like grace. It feels like loss. It feels like the end.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Movement 2)

## MOVEMENT 2: AT THE WATER'S EDGE (*The Turning*)

*"On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, 'Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, "Rivers of living water will flow from his heart."'" — John 7:37-38 (NLT)*

## A Moment to Consider

By now, you should see the tempo and pattern of the book. You've been introduced to scriptures and writings about the true character of God's love. You've walked through four chapters about naming the swamp, crying out for help, making a decision, and letting something die.

Maybe you've been nodding along, intellectually interested but still holding back.

Maybe you've prayed the prayers but kept one foot in the swamp, just in case this doesn't work out.

Maybe you're standing at this water's edge thinking, "This all sounds nice, but is it real? Is this God thing actually important to my life?"

Here's what I want to ask you:

**Are you ready to at least acknowledge that the tugging of your soul toward something greater than yourself has merit?**

Not asking you to have it all figured out. Not asking you to become religious (that's the last thing I would suggest). Not asking you to check all the theological boxes.

Just asking: Can you admit that maybe—just maybe—there's something real here? That the Voice you've been hearing isn't just wishful thinking? That the pull you feel toward Love, toward Truth, toward Something More might actually be worth following?

Because if you can't admit that yet, the rest of Movement 2 is going to feel like empty religious language.

But if you can take that one small step—acknowledging that this might be real, that God might actually love you, that grace might actually be for you—then what comes next will change everything.

You don't have to be certain. You just have to be willing.

*Take a moment. Right now. Before you keep reading.*

Can you say, even tentatively: "God, I'm willing to believe You might be real. I'm willing to consider that You love me. I'm willing to let You wash me, even if I don't fully understand how."

That's enough. That willingness opens the door.

You've left the swamp.

It wasn't easy. Maybe you're still looking back over your shoulder, wondering if you made the right choice. Your feet are heavy with swamp mud. Your clothes are soaked, clinging to you. You smell like the muck you just escaped.

But you're here. At the water's edge.

This is liminal space. The in-between. Not swamp anymore, but not healed yet either. Not drowning, but not dancing. Not death, but not resurrection. Not Friday, not Sunday.

This is Saturday. Tomb time. Transition.

The water's edge is where grace does its most subversive work.

You want to clean yourself up before you step into the water. You're embarrassed by the mud, the stench, the evidence of where you've been. Surely you need to get yourself together first, right?

Wrong.

Grace says: Come as you are. Mud and all. Shame and all. Questions and all.

The water isn't there to judge you. It's there to wash you.

But here's the hard part: You have to let yourself be washed. You have to get in the water. You have to let grace touch the wounds.

And that's terrifying.

Because what if you're too dirty? What if the water rejects you? What if grace has limits and you've exceeded them?

These chapters—5 through 8—are about discovering the answer to those fears. And the answer is always the same: Grace is deeper than your shame. Wider than your failure. Stronger than your sin. More persistent than your doubt.

**Want to know what you'll discover at the water's edge?**

You're going to encounter something—Someone—in new ways:

- Living Water that quenches thirst you didn't know how to name
- Shadow that covers and protects in the scorching wilderness
- Amazing grace that reaches those who don't deserve it
- An invitation to dig deeper, to go beneath the surface and find bedrock truth

There's an ancient story about a woman who came to a well at noon—the hottest time of day, when nobody else would be there. She was hiding from judgment, carrying shame from five failed marriages. And she met someone there who offered her "living water"—water that becomes a spring welling up to eternal life.

You're going to learn what she learned: being truly known and truly loved changes everything.

You're going to discover what ancient poets knew: that there's shelter, refuge, rest—a shadow of protection under whose wings we find safety.

You're going to learn what an old hymn declares: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

You're going to learn what the deep places teach: that grace doesn't just wash the surface—it goes all the way down to bedrock.

These aren't abstract theological concepts. They're water on your parched tongue. Shade on your scorched skin. Arms that hold you when you collapse. Truth that sets you free.

The water's edge is where you stop running from what's Real and start running toward it.

Where you stop hiding and start being found.

Where you stop performing and start receiving.

This is the turning. The hinge of your story. The moment when the narrative shifts from "I can't" to "maybe I can be helped." From "I'm too far gone" to "grace reaches farther."

### **The Journey at the Water's Edge:**

**Chapter 5: Living Waters Edge** - You stand at the edge of the water, filthy from the swamp, convinced you have to clean yourself up before you can approach. But grace invites you to come as you are. The water



doesn't recoil—it receives you. This is the scandalous truth: you don't clean yourself up to receive grace. You receive grace to be cleaned.

### Living Waters Edge

**Chapter 6: In the Shadow of Your Grace** - In the desert of transition, you discover that grace isn't just rescue from the pit—it's shelter in the wilderness. The shadow doesn't remove the sun; it provides covering under it. You learn the difference between hiding FROM truth and hiding IN truth. And you discover that the shadow proves the light is real.

### In the Shadow of Your Grace

**Chapter 7: Amazing Grace I Did Receive** - You stand at the water's edge covered in the consequences of your choices—the shame of trampling on grace, the grave of autonomy, the dead-end road of self-rule. And you hear the whisper: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." Not someone mostly good. A wretch. Grace is scandalous precisely because it's for those who don't deserve it. And when you step toward the water, you feel Love's hand lifting you from the grave.

### Amazing Grace

**Chapter 8: Dig a Little Deeper** - The surface mud is washing away, but underneath is scar tissue—layers of protection, coping mechanisms, wounds you've been medicating for years. Real healing requires going deeper. Cutting through the scar tissue. Opening the wound so it can drain. Excavating through performance, shame, wounds, and false beliefs until you hit bedrock truth: You are loved. You are worthy. You are enough. And grace goes all the way down.

### Dig a Little Deeper

So stand here. At the edge. Feel the coolness of the water lapping at your toes. Hear the invitation: Come. Drink. Be washed. Be healed. Be made new.

You don't have to have it all together. You don't have to understand it all. You just have to wade in.

The water's not going to hurt you. It's going to heal you.

One step at a time.

*What would it mean to approach healing without pretense? To come as you are, not as you think you should be?*

Grace is deeper than you know. Wider than you can measure. Stronger than your shame. More faithful than you've dared to hope.

At the water's edge, you're about to discover just how amazing grace really is.

## Entering This Movement

Before you wade into these four chapters, pause here at the water's edge. Look at where you've been. Feel where you are. Prepare for what comes next.

### **Look back at the swamp.**

You've come through Movement 1. That wasn't easy. You got honest. You named the swamp. You cried out. You made the decision. You let something die.

That took courage. Real courage. Not the kind that pretends to be strong, but the kind that admits weakness.

Don't minimize what you did. Don't rush past it. You stepped out of the swamp. That matters.

### **Look at where you are now.**

You're at the edge of the water. Still carrying the mud from the swamp. Still smelling like the muck you just escaped. Still a little

shaky from the journey.

You're in liminal space. The in-between. Not swamp anymore, but not healed yet either.

This is uncomfortable. Liminal space always is. Because you're between identities—no longer who you were, not yet who you're becoming.

But this is also sacred space. Because this is where grace does its most transforming work.

**What this movement requires:**

Movement 1 required honesty. You had to stop pretending and get real about the swamp.

Movement 2 requires receptivity. You have to let yourself be washed, held, healed. You have to receive what you can't earn.

That's harder than it sounds.

Because everything in you wants to clean yourself up first. To prove you're worthy of grace. To do something to deserve the healing.

But grace doesn't work that way. Grace says: Come as you are. Receive what you can't earn. Let yourself be loved.

Can you do that?

Can you step into the water without trying to clean yourself up first?

Can you receive grace even though you don't deserve it?

Can you let yourself be known—really known, mud and all—and still believe you're loved?

That's the work of Movement 2.

**The woman at the well knew this.**

She came to draw water at noon—the hottest time of day, when nobody else would be there. She was hiding from judgment, carrying shame from five failed marriages.

And she met Someone there who offered "living water"—water that becomes a spring welling up to eternal life.

She tried to deflect. To change the subject. To avoid being fully known.

But He kept bringing her back to the truth: I see you. All of you. And I'm offering you living water anyway.

Being truly known and truly loved—that's what she discovered at the well.

That's what you're about to discover at the water's edge.

**One question before you begin:**

Are you willing to be known?

Not the version of yourself you present to the world. But the real you. The one who's been hiding in the swamp. The one who's afraid of being rejected. The one who's convinced there's not enough grace for them.

Are you willing to let grace see all of that? And trust that it's enough?

If you are—even tentatively, even uncertainly—then you're ready.

The water is here. The invitation is extended. Grace is waiting.

*Wade in. One step at a time. The water's not going to hurt you. It's going to heal you.*

*When you're ready, turn to Chapter 5: Living Waters Edge.*

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 5)

## MOVEMENT 2: AT THE WATER'S EDGE (The Turning)

### Chapter 5: Living Waters Edge

*"Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." — John 4:14*

Living Waters Edge



*Scan to listen: Living Waters Edge*

Have you ever stood at a threshold between your old life and something new? Not knowing if you're ready. Not sure you're worthy. Covered in the evidence of where you've been, wondering if you're clean enough to step forward?

That's where this chapter lives. At the water's edge.

And here's what I want you to know: You don't have to clean up first. The water is what cleans you.

I know that might sound strange. Or too good to be true. Or like spiritual talk that doesn't apply to real life.

But stay with me. Because this chapter is about the moment when everything you've been carrying—the shame, the failure, the mud from the swamp—meets something that can actually wash it away.

Can you be open to that possibility? Even if you don't fully believe it yet?

### **A Prayer of Invitation**

You've walked through four chapters. You've named the swamp. You've cried out for help. You've been confronted with the need to decide. You've learned that something has to die.

And now you're here. At the water's edge.

Maybe this is the moment. The moment when you stop spinning in circles and start walking straight. When you stop analyzing and start trusting. When you make the decision to let God in—not just to your thoughts, but to your soul.

If you're ready—even if you're scared, even if you're uncertain—you can pray this prayer right now. Out loud or in your heart. Perfectly worded or stumbling through. It doesn't matter. What matters is that you mean it.

*"God, I need You. I can't do this on my own anymore. I've tried, and I'm exhausted. I'm stuck in this swamp, and I don't know the way out.*

*I believe You're real—or at least, I want to believe. Help me with my unbelief.*

*I'm sorry for the ways I've pushed You away, for trying to run my own life, for making a mess of things. I know I can't fix this by myself.*

*Jesus, I believe You came for people like me—broken, messy, stuck. I believe You died so I could be forgiven and live a new life. I accept that gift. I receive Your grace.*

*Come into my life. Come into my soul. Fill me with Your Spirit. Teach me to hear Your voice. Lead me out of this swamp and into the life You have for me.*

*I'm willing to follow, even when I don't understand. I'm willing to trust, even when I'm afraid. I'm choosing You—today, right now.*

*Thank You for not giving up on me. Thank You for meeting me here, in the mess. I'm Yours. Amen."*

If you prayed that prayer—even tentatively, even with doubts still swirling—something real just happened. Not because the words were magic. But because God was listening. And when you opened the door, He stepped in.

You might not feel different right away. You might still feel stuck, still feel afraid. That's okay. This is the beginning, not the end. The decision has been made. Now comes the journey.

This chapter is about what happens when you step into the water. When you let grace wash over you. When you discover that the water doesn't recoil from your mud—it cleanses it.

Keep reading. You're about to get wet.

## **What Is Grace? (And Why Do You Need It?)**

We've been using this word a lot. Grace. It sounds religious, doesn't it? Like something that belongs in stained-glass windows and hymns. Something abstract. Theological. Distant.

But grace isn't religious. Grace is real.

Let me tell you what grace actually is—not in church language, but in human language. In the language of the swamp and the water's edge.

**Grace is the gift you can't earn.**

Everything in our world operates on exchange. You work, you get paid. You perform, you get approval. You achieve, you get status. You give, you expect something back. That's the economy we know. The one we live in every day.

Grace breaks that economy completely. That's why I say "Grace is scandalous."

Grace says: "I'm giving you something you didn't earn, don't deserve, and can never pay back. And I'm giving it freely, fully, without strings attached."

It's the water at the edge of the swamp that doesn't ask, "Are you worthy?" It just invites: "Come and drink."

**Grace is love without conditions—and that's the scandal.**

Maybe you've spent your whole life trying to earn love. Be good enough. Smart enough. Successful enough. Attractive enough. Useful enough. And when you fall short—when you mess up, fail, disappoint—you brace yourself for rejection.

Grace doesn't work that way.

Grace looks at you covered in swamp mud—the worst of what you've done, the deepest shame you carry, the ugliest parts you try to hide—and says, "I love you. Right now. Exactly as you are. Not because of what you've done, but because of who you are. You're mine. And nothing you do can change that."

It's not tolerance. It's not "I'll put up with you." It's not "I love you despite your flaws."



It's "I love you. Period. Full stop. The mess doesn't change it. The failure doesn't diminish it. The distance you've run doesn't decrease it."

Here's what makes grace so hard to accept: It's too good to be true. Everything in you wants to add conditions: "But I have to do something, right? I have to earn it somehow. I have to be good enough first."

No. That's not grace. That's exchange. That's performance.

Grace says: "Come. Drink. Be washed. Be healed. Be made new. Bring nothing but your thirst and your mess. That's enough."

And that's terrifying. Because if you can't earn it, you can't control it. You have to trust the One offering it.

**Grace is power that transforms, not just accepts.**

Here's what makes grace different from just acceptance or tolerance: Grace doesn't leave you in the swamp. It doesn't just say, "You're okay as you are, so stay there."

Grace says, "Come as you are—and I'll make you new."

The water doesn't require you to be clean before you step in. But it also doesn't leave you dirty once you're in it. It washes. It cleanses. It transforms.

**Grace is the only thing powerful enough to break the cycle.**

You've been trying to fix yourself for how long now? To be better. To break the patterns. To stop the destructive behaviors. To heal the wounds. To fill the void.

And how's that working?

Here's the truth you already know: You can't save yourself. You can't self-help your way out of the swamp. You can't positive-think your way to wholeness. You can't earn your way to peace.

The harder you try to clean yourself up, the more exhausted you become. The more you strive to be worthy, the more you realize you're not. The more you perform, the more hollow it feels.

Grace breaks that cycle.

### **Why do you need grace?**

Because you're human. And being human means:

- **You're broken.** Not "a little flawed." Actually broken. Your best efforts produce mixed results. Your purest motives are tangled with selfishness. Your greatest strengths have shadow sides. You hurt people you love. You betray your own values. You make messes you can't clean up.

- **You're thirsty.** There's a deep thirst in you that nothing in this world can satisfy. Not success. Not relationships. Not pleasure. Not achievement. Not even love from other people. You've tried to fill it, and everything you pour in leaks out. You need living water—water that becomes a spring within you, never running dry.

- **You're stuck.** The swamp has you. The patterns repeat. The wounds won't heal. The shame won't lift. The void won't fill. You know you need to change, but you can't seem to do it. Knowledge isn't enough. Willpower isn't enough. Trying harder isn't enough.

- **You're exhausted.** The performance is killing you. The pretending is draining you. The striving is crushing you. You're tired of holding it all together. Tired of the mask. Tired of the hustle. You need rest—real rest—the kind that goes soul-deep.

Grace is for the broken, the thirsty, the stuck, the exhausted.

Grace is for you.

### **What does grace do?**

Grace does what you cannot do for yourself. It forgives—taking the weight of your past and saying, "This doesn't define you anymore. You're free." It heals—not just surface wounds but the deep ones you've been medicating for years. It transforms—not through willpower but through the power of being truly loved. And it sustains—not as a one-time event but as a river that keeps flowing, a source you return to every day.

**Grace is not a thing. It's a Person.**

Here's the deepest truth: Grace isn't just a concept or a force. Grace is the character of God. It's who He is.

God doesn't just give grace. He is grace.

When you encounter grace, you're encountering God. When you receive grace, you're receiving Him. When you're washed by grace, you're being held by Love itself.

That's why the water is called "living water." It's not just H<sub>2</sub>O. It's the presence of God flowing into your life, into your soul, into your deepest places.

And that's why you need it. Not just to feel better. Not just to be a better person. But to know—truly know—that you're loved, you're forgiven, you're whole, you're home.

There's a moment between leaving and arriving that feels impossible.

You've left the swamp—made the decision, taken the first steps, walked away from the place that was killing you. But you haven't arrived anywhere yet. You're in the liminal space. The threshold. The water's edge.

Behind you: everything you've known. The familiar toxicity. The adaptive survival patterns. The identity you built in the muck.

Ahead of you: the unknown. Clean water that both attracts and terrifies you. An invitation you're not sure you're qualified to accept.

And here's what makes this moment so hard: the swamp is still on you. You can smell it on your clothes. Feel the dried mud cracking on your skin. Taste the bitterness in your mouth. You've left, but you're not yet clean. You've chosen freedom, but you're not yet free.

This is the water's edge—where decision meets transformation. Where leaving meets arriving. Where the old is passing away but the new hasn't yet fully come.

And the question that haunts you: Can I really step into that clean water looking like this?

Part of you wants to clean up first. Get yourself together. Become worthy of the gift before you receive it.

But there's no pre-water ritual. No "get yourself ready first" station.

Just the water. And you. And the invitation.

The writing that follows came from my time at this threshold. When I'd made the decision to leave but couldn't yet see how transformation would happen. When I stood at the edge of grace, covered in swamp, and had to learn the hardest lesson:

You don't clean up to receive grace. Grace is what cleans you up.

You kneel at the water's edge, hands trembling. The bank is soft under your knees. You lean forward, cupping your hands together, and dip them into the water.

It's shockingly cool. But also... alive. You can feel the current trying to pull your hands downstream. You can feel the movement, the energy, the power.

You lift your cupped hands to your lips and drink.

The water is cool and sweet and everything you didn't know you needed. It tastes like snow-melt and stone and something you can only call purity. It washes away the bitter taste of the swamp, the metallic

tang of fear, the sour residue of shame.

You drink again. And again. Greedy for it now. Desperate for it.

And as you drink, something inside you whispers: This is what I've been thirsting for. Not just water. Living water. The kind that reaches all the way down into the dried-up, hollowed-out places and says, "I can make this live again."

You look at the river. Then at yourself. Then back at the river.

The invitation is clear: Come in. Let yourself be washed. Let the water do what you cannot do for yourself.

But can you? Can you really step into that clean water covered in all this filth? Can you trust that the water is strong enough to handle your mess?

The sun climbs higher. The mist begins to thin. And you're still kneeling at the water's edge, caught between the swamp you've left and the cleansing you need, wondering if grace is really as scandalous as they say—scandalous enough to wash even you.

## **Key Themes**

### **1. Water as Metaphor for Grace, Healing, and Forgiveness**

Water runs through human wisdom and spiritual literature like a river through a landscape. From ancient creation stories to modern poetry, water marks the places where transformation happens.

In the beginning, divine presence hovered over the waters and spoke order into being. Throughout ancient texts, water appears at pivotal moments: It destroys and preserves in the flood. It parts to deliver in the Exodus. It heals disease in the Jordan. It flows from rock in the wilderness.

Water is life, cleansing, healing, transformation, and abundance. Grace is all of this—made flesh in Jesus's encounter with the woman at the well:

*"Jesus replied, 'Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.'"* — John 4:13-14 (NLT)

The conversation shifts. Jesus asks about her husband. She tries to deflect: "I have no husband."

Jesus responds with devastating gentleness: "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

He sees her. Completely. Knows her history. Knows her shame. Knows her secrets.

And He doesn't condemn. Doesn't lecture. Doesn't reject.

He just... sees her.

*What would it feel like to be truly seen—completely known—and not condemned?*

And being truly seen—without condemnation, without rejection, with nothing but love—changes everything.

She starts asking theological questions, trying to understand this man who knows her completely and still speaks to her with dignity. Jesus reveals Himself: "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." The Messiah. The one she and her people have been waiting for.

And she believes. Right there at the well. At the water's edge.

She leaves her water jar—the very thing she came for—and runs back to town. The town she'd been avoiding. And she tells everyone: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

The woman who came in shame leaves as an evangelist. The woman who came alone in the heat of the day returns to bring the whole town to meet Jesus. The woman who came thirsty for water leaves having drunk from the source of living water.

That's what happens at the water's edge.

## **2. The Threshold – Where Obedience Meets Miracle**

Or consider another story from the book of Joshua. Ancient Israel stood on the edge of the promised land after wandering forty years. Between them and the promise: the Jordan River. And it's not just flowing—it's flooding:

*"It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, the water above that point began backing up a great distance away... And all the people crossed over." — Joshua 3:15-16 (NLT)*

God gives Joshua strange instructions: Have the priests carrying the ark of the covenant step into the water. Not after it parts. Before. While it's still flooding.

They have to get their feet wet before the miracle happens.

Imagine being one of those priests. Carrying the most sacred object—the symbol of divine presence—toward a flooding river. Every instinct screams: Wait for the water to stop! Don't risk it! Don't step in until it's safe!

But that's not how trust works. Trust doesn't wait for risk to disappear. Trust steps in while the risk is real.

And they do it. The moment their feet touch the water's edge, the water from upstream stops flowing.

The water's edge is where obedience meets miracle. Where faith becomes sight. Where stepping forward in trust releases transformative power.

The edge is the threshold. You can stand on the shore and talk about water all day. You can study it, analyze it, understand its chemical composition. But until you step in—until your feet touch the water's edge—you don't experience it.

Eugene Peterson writes:

*"The Christian life is not a quiet escape to a garden where we can walk and talk uninterruptedly with our Lord; nor is it a fantasy trip to a heavenly city where we can compare our blue ribbons and gold medals with other Christians... It is the active and loving obedience of faith, lived in the rough and tumble of this world, where God's grace intersects with human need." — Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

The water's edge is where that intersection happens. Where grace meets our desperate need. Where theology becomes experience.

### **3. The Transition from Running From to Running Toward**

There's a psychological and spiritual shift that happens at the water's edge. A reversal. A turning.

Before, we run from what's Real. We hide like the first humans in the garden: "I heard you, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

We flee like Jonah, running to get as far from truth's call as possible, ending up in the belly of a fish before we finally surrender.



We avoid by staying so busy with activity that we never have to face the intimacy that Reality actually wants with us.

Why do we run? Because we're afraid. Afraid Reality will see the real us and be disappointed. Afraid it will demand things we're not willing to give. Afraid we'll be rejected if we don't perform well enough. Afraid that if we get too close, we'll discover that love has conditions after all.

So we run. Or we hide. Or we stay busy. Anything to keep truth at arm's length.

But the swamp changes things. In the swamp, hiding doesn't work anymore. Performance fails. Busyness exhausts us. And we discover that we're not running from judgment—we're running from love.

Because judgment we could handle. We've been handling judgment our whole lives. Self-judgment, others' judgment, internalized shame—we know what to do with that. We perform, we prove ourselves, we try harder.

But love? Unconditional, unearned, relentless love? That's terrifying.

Because if we're loved as we are, then we have to stop performing. Stop earning. Stop hiding. And we don't know who we'd be without all that.

At the water's edge, something shifts. We stop running from and start stumbling toward.

We start seeking like the ancient poet: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you."

We start thirsting like the crowds who heard Jesus cry out: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."

We start reaching like the woman with the issue of blood, desperate enough to push through the crowd and touch the hem of Jesus' garment because we finally realize: Our greatest danger isn't being seen in our

need. Our greatest danger is dying of thirst while standing next to the fountain.

A.W. Tozer understood this desperate thirst:

*"God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible—what a pity that we plan only the things that we can do by ourselves." — A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God*

We come to the water when we finally admit we can't save ourselves. When we stop planning what we can do and start receiving what only God can do.

For years, I ran. I was in involved, teaching, doing all the "right things"—and running. Because I was terrified He'd get too close and see the real me. The mess. The doubt. The darkness. The anger. The parts that didn't fit the image.

The swamp was awful, but at least I could hide there. At least the mud covered me. At least I could blend into the murk and no one—not even God—could see clearly.

But at the water's edge, I couldn't hide anymore. I was exposed. Vulnerable. Raw.

And I realized: I wasn't running from judgment. I was running from love.

The water's edge is where I stopped running from God and started stumbling toward Him. Where I discovered that the most honest prayer I could pray wasn't "Make me good enough." It was "See me as I am—and please don't turn away."

And He didn't. He doesn't. He never does.

#### **4. Baptism: Death to Old, Birth to New**

Baptism is the ritual of the water's edge—the physical enactment of what happens spiritually when we come to God.

**Baptism is obedience.** Even Jesus submitted to baptism, telling John the Baptist: "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires" (Matthew 3:15, NLT). After His resurrection, Jesus commanded His followers: "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, NLT). This isn't optional—it's a command.

**Baptism is death and resurrection.** Going under the water: Death. Burial of the old self. The swamp-covered, broken version of you dies. Coming up out of the water: Resurrection. New life. You emerge clean, forgiven, made new.

This isn't just metaphor. Paul says it's spiritually real:

*"For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was." — Romans 6:4-5 (NLT)*

When you go under the water, you're united with Christ in His death. When you come up, you're united with Him in His resurrection.

**Why baptism matters:** It's obedience to Jesus's command. It's your public declaration before witnesses—"I belong to Jesus now." It's a spiritual marker, a covenant moment that changes something we don't fully understand. And it's your initiation into the community of believers.

**Have you considered baptism?**

If you prayed that prayer earlier in this chapter—if you invited God into your soul—then baptism is your next step. Not because you have to earn anything, but because obedience flows from love. Because

public declaration solidifies private decision. Because there's something powerful about going under the water and coming up new.

Talk to a pastor. Find a church community. Schedule your baptism. Step into the water.

Standing at the water's edge forever isn't the goal. The goal is to step in. To go under. To come up new.

And if you've already been baptized, remember your baptism. Remember the old you that died and the new you that rose. Remember the covenant you made, the identity you claimed, the life you said yes to.

Baptism isn't only about our pledge to God—it's also about God's pledge to us. The water's edge is where we receive what Love offers, not where we prove we're worthy to receive it.

## **5. The Vulnerability of Letting Yourself Be Washed**

There's something deeply vulnerable about being washed. To be washed, you have to be touched. You have to let someone see the dirt. You have to stop hiding.

This is the tender, terrifying heart of the chapter.

Think about Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13:

*"When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.' 'No,' Peter protested, 'you will never ever wash my feet!' Jesus replied, 'Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me.'" — John 13:6-8 (NLT)*

It's the night before His crucifixion. Jesus knows what's coming. And He takes off His outer garment, wraps a towel around His waist, pours water into a basin, and begins washing their feet.

Peter's reaction is classic: "No, you will never ever wash my feet!"

Why? Because it's humiliating. The Master shouldn't serve the servant. The clean shouldn't touch the dirty. This is backwards. Wrong. Uncomfortable.

But Jesus says something profound: "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

Let that sink in. Unless I wash you. Not "unless you wash yourself." Not "unless you clean up first." Unless I wash you.

What's He saying? You're already loved. Already accepted. Already Mine. You just need to let Me serve you. Let Me wash the parts of you that have gotten dirty walking through this world. Let Me touch the places you think are too shameful, too broken, too contaminated.

For us, the vulnerability is this: Admitting we need washing. Admitting we can't clean ourselves up. Admitting we're dirty and letting Love touch the dirt.

That's terrifying. Because what if it recoils? What if even grace has limits? What if I'm too much even for living water?

But the wayfarer at the water's edge discovers: Grace has no limits. Grace washes what shame says is unwashable. Grace touches what fear says is untouchable.

Timothy Keller illuminates this scandalous grace:

*"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." — Timothy Keller, The Meaning of Marriage*

This is the water's edge truth: You're worse than you thought—and more loved than you imagined. Both at the same time.

At the water's edge, I was trying hard to practice vulnerability and connection. I was meeting with friends, making progress on creative projects, engaging in introspection and prayer. Outwardly, momentum was building.

But I was also exhausted. Disconnected at times. Empty in ways I couldn't quite articulate.

The water's edge isn't instant healing. It's the beginning of healing. You can be making real progress and still feel the weight of the journey. That's not failure—that's honesty.

Ruth Haley Barton writes about this tender in-between place:

*"Transformation is not about trying harder or doing more. It is about entering more deeply into the mystery of our own belovedness... and trusting the process that is beyond our control." — Ruth Haley Barton, Sacred Rhythms*

At the water's edge, we learn to trust the process even when we can't control the outcome. We step in, covered in mud, and trust the water to do what only water can do.

You can be stepping toward the water and still be covered in swamp mud. That's not hypocrisy—that's the reality of transformation. It doesn't happen all at once. It happens in stages, in steps, in moments of surrender and trust.

## The Core Scripture Truth

Centuries before Jesus, a prophet spoke this invitation:

*"Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it's all free!" — Isaiah 55:1 (NLT)*

Come thirsty, desperate, empty-handed. Not "pay first." Not "earn it." Just come. The water is free and waiting.

And there's another invitation, spoken by Jesus at a festival in Jerusalem:

*"On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, 'Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, "Rivers of living water will flow from his heart."'" — John 7:37-38 (NLT)*

**"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me":**

Not anyone who's good enough. Not anyone who's cleaned up. Not anyone who's figured it out. Not anyone who's earned it.

Anyone who's thirsty.

Are you thirsty? Parched. Dry. Desperate for something that will actually satisfy. Then you qualify. That's the only requirement: thirst.

**"Anyone who believes in me may come and drink":**

Come to Me. Jesus. Person. Presence. The source of living water.

And drink. Receive. Take in. Stop trying to earn it and just receive it. Open your mouth and let the water in. Let it quench the thirst you've been carrying for years.

**"Rivers of living water will flow from his heart":**

Not stagnant water. Living water. Water that moves, that flows, that brings life wherever it goes.

Not external only. From within—internal transformation that flows outward. You don't just get washed on the outside. You become a source of living water yourself. The Spirit dwells in you, and what

flows from you is the same life-giving, cleansing, healing water that you received.

John adds commentary: "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."

Living water equals the Holy Spirit. God's very presence dwelling in you. Not visiting occasionally. Not hovering nearby. Dwelling. Making His home. Taking up residence in the deepest parts of you.

This is the promise at the water's edge: You will be filled. Not just cleaned. Filled. With God's Spirit. God's life. God's love. And it will flow from you like a river—life-giving, cleansing, healing—to everyone around you.

The invitation stands: "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink!"

Come to the water's edge. Come as you are—muddy, ashamed, broken, desperate. Come thirsty. And drink.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

This is the scandal of grace. The offense of it. The relief of it.

You don't have to fix yourself first. You can't. That's the whole point.

You come as you are. Mud-covered. Shame-soaked. Exhausted from trying and failing. Broken from years of pretending. Thirsty beyond words.

And feeling... nothing. Except the growing conviction that miracles were for other people. Not for me.

But the hardness was a lie. Underneath it was crushing hope—hope that there could be a Savior who actually loved me, who would actually pay my debt. Hope that had been beaten down so many times it had learned to hide behind anger.



The next morning I woke up, and I was still there. Still carrying the mess I'd created back home. I decided it was time to do some work on my life. Which meant—for me—going somewhere to think, to pray, to meditate.

What would I do?

I put my headphones on and played a song—"Word of God Speak" by MercyMe—over and over and over. And I wept completely, from the deepest part of my inner being.

What happened next? I guess I'll just say: I received my miracle.

And I was comforted in knowing: it's going to be okay.

That moment became my permission slip. Permission to admit I wanted a miracle. Permission to confess I felt unworthy. Permission to take off the mask and come to the water's edge as I actually was—broken, desperate, thirsty.

## **Song Integration**

Standing at Lake Hefner's boat ramp that April morning, I was at the end of myself. The boat ramp descends into the lake, pavement giving way to water—a threshold between termination and transformation. The road I'd been traveling—self-sufficiency, performance, earning worthiness—had run out. The pavement simply stopped. And beyond it: water.

"Living Water's Edge" emerges from the tension between two biblical realities: our profound unworthiness and God's scandalous willingness to make us whole anyway. This isn't a song about people who stumbled slightly. This is about people "burdened down by guilt and shame, no hope to be relieved"—the terminally stuck, the chronically unworthy, those who've given up hope that miracles are for them.

## **Lyrics: Living Water's Edge**

### **(Verse 1)**

Have you longed for a miracle, felt unworthy to believe?  
Burdened down by guilt and shame, no hope to be relieved.  
In the darkness, you have wondered, "Can I ever be made whole?"  
Jesus stands with arms wide open, He's the Savior of your soul.

### **(Verse 2)**

Have you seen a heart surrendered, healed by mercy's gentle hand?  
Felt the joy of restoration, love you cannot understand?  
Bring your pain and all your burdens; leave them at the cross  
tonight.  
Let His power make you righteous, shining pure in holy light.

### **(Chorus)**

Have you seen a miracle, felt His love that sets you free?  
It's a gift beyond all measure, full of grace and majesty.  
Come and drink the living water, let it wash your fear away.  
Jesus breaks the chains that bind you; He's your miracle today.

### **(Verse 3)**

Have you felt the weight of sorrow, like a chain you cannot break?  
Every step feels weak and heavy, every move a deep mistake.  
Jesus sees your every struggle, and He whispers, "You are Mine."  
Through His grace, the chains will shatter; you will rise in love  
divine.

### **(Bridge)**

Lift your hands and call upon Him; He will meet you where you  
stand.  
Every tear and cry of sorrow, He will hold within His hand.

Feel the freedom in His presence, leave your past and walk His way.

Jesus loves you and redeems you; He's your miracle today.

**(Chorus)**

Have you seen a miracle, felt His love that sets you free?

It's a gift beyond all measure, full of grace and majesty.

Come and drink the living water, let it wash your fear away.

Jesus breaks the chains that bind you; He's your miracle today.

**(Outro)**

He's your miracle today,

Jesus is your miracle today.

## Key Takeaways

- **You don't clean up to receive grace; grace cleans you up.** The water doesn't recoil from your mud—it washes it away. Come as you are, covered in swamp, and let the living water do what only it can do.
- **Grace is scandalously free—and that's the point.** You can't earn it, deserve it, or repay it. It's a gift for the thirsty, the broken, the stuck, and the exhausted—which means it's for you.
- **Being fully known and fully loved is possible.** The woman at the well discovered that Jesus sees everything and still offers living water. Transparency isn't rejection—it's the doorway to real relationship.
- **Baptism is both death and birth.** Going under symbolizes dying to the old self; coming up represents resurrection to new life. This public declaration marks your covenant and identity transformation.

## Reflections for the Road

These aren't homework. They're invitations. Gentle questions to help you engage with your own thirst, your own need for living water.

### Questions for the Journey:

**1. Where are you with the water? Still in the swamp? At the edge? Already in, being washed?**

Be honest about where you actually are, not where you think you should be. If you're still in the swamp, that's okay. If you're at the edge but afraid to step in, that's okay too. Grace meets you where you are.

**2. What's keeping you from stepping into the water? Fear? Shame? Unworthiness? The belief that you have to clean up first?**

Name the obstacle. Shame loses its power when it's brought into the light. Fear shrinks when it's spoken aloud. What's the lie you're believing about grace?

**3. Read John 4 slowly. Put yourself in the woman's place. What does Jesus see in you? What does He offer?**

This isn't theological study. This is personal encounter. Imagine yourself at the well. Imagine Jesus asking you for a drink. Imagine Him seeing everything you've ever done—and offering you living water anyway.

## Closing Image

You're standing in the water now. Not all the way in—just ankles deep. Just enough to feel it's real. Cool and shocking and clean.

The mud from the swamp is starting to wash away. Not instantly. Not all at once. But gradually. With each step deeper, more of it lifts off. Carried downstream by the current.

You look down at your feet. You can see them through the water.  
Clear. The stones beneath them smooth and solid.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 6)

## MOVEMENT 2: AT THE WATER'S EDGE (The Turning)

### Chapter 6: In the Shadow of Your Grace

*"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." — Psalm 91:1*

In the Shadow of Your Grace

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylerthomas.com/wqg9eX>



*Scan to listen: In the Shadow of Your Grace*

### An Invitation to Reflect

You've walked through five chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out for help, made a decision to move, let something die, and stepped into living water.

Maybe you've even accepted baptism—that powerful symbol of death to the old and birth to the new.

But now I need to ask you something important:

**How seriously have you been able to accept God? To accept Jesus? To accept the living water of baptism washing over you?**

Are these just ideas you're entertaining? Nice concepts you're considering? Or are you actually letting them change you?

Because here's what I've discovered: there's a difference between acknowledging truth and living in it. Between knowing about the water and actually staying immersed in it.

You've made it this far. But the journey doesn't end at the water's edge. The question is: **Are you ready to continue this journey dwelling in the living water and moving forward with your life?**

Not going back to the swamp. Not just standing at the edge analyzing. But actually walking forward, day by day, learning what it means to live washed, sheltered, and held by grace.

This isn't about perfection. It's about direction. It's about choosing, again and again, to stay in the water rather than retreat to what's familiar.

So before you read further, pause. Consider:

*Can you say, even imperfectly: "God, I'm choosing to stay in the water. I'm choosing to keep walking forward. I'm choosing to let Your love define me, even when it's hard, even when the wilderness stretches ahead, even when I don't understand everything yet."*

That's enough. That's the commitment that opens what comes next.

Because in this chapter, you're going to discover something crucial: Grace doesn't just wash you. Grace shelters you for the journey ahead.

Have you ever been disappointed that healing didn't look the way you expected?

You thought getting out of the swamp meant the hard part was over. You thought grace would whisk you away to some peaceful place where everything would finally be easy.

But here you are. You've been washed. You've stepped into the water. You've felt grace begin its work.

And you're discovering that there's still a journey ahead. Still hard terrain. Still scorching days and uncertain paths.

Maybe you're wondering: *Is this all there is? Did I leave the swamp just to end up in a desert?*

I've been there. And here's what I learned: Grace doesn't always look like escape. Sometimes grace looks like shelter.

Can I show you what I mean?

You've been washed. You've stepped into the water, felt grace begin its work, experienced the first cleansing. And you thought—maybe you hoped—that would be the end of the hard part.

But you're discovering something: leaving the swamp doesn't mean instant arrival in paradise. There's a wilderness between the swamp and the promised land. A space of formation. A season of walking.

And the wilderness is hard in different ways.

The swamp was toxic and suffocating. The wilderness is exposed and relentless. In the swamp, you couldn't breathe. In the wilderness, you feel every scorching reality. Heat beats down. The path stretches endlessly. Your resources feel insufficient.

This is where many wayfarers give up. They expect grace to remove them from all difficulty. Eliminate every trial. Make life comfortable and easy. And when they discover grace does something different—provides shelter within the trial rather than escape from it—they're tempted to turn back.



But here's what you're learning: grace isn't just rescue from the pit. Grace is also shelter in the wilderness.

The shadow doesn't eliminate the sun. It provides covering under it.

Grace doesn't always remove the hard season. It shelters you through it.

This chapter is about dwelling in that shadow. About learning that presence in the midst of difficulty is grace enough. That you don't face the heat alone.

The writing that follows came from my wilderness season. When I'd been washed but not yet arrived. When I had to learn that grace isn't always escape—sometimes it's shelter. And that shelter is enough.

## Key Themes

### 1. Grace as Shelter, Not Escape

We often think of grace as removal from difficult circumstances. Take away the pain. Change the situation. Fix what's broken. Make it all better.

But the shadow of grace works differently.

The shadow doesn't remove the sun—it provides covering under it. Grace doesn't always eliminate the trial—it shelters us through it.

This is the scandal we don't want to hear: sometimes the answer to "Deliver me from this" is "I will be with you in it."

Consider Psalm 91:1-2:

*"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him." — Psalm*

91:1-2 (NLT)

Notice the language: shelter, shadow, refuge, fortress. Not words of elimination—words of protection. A fortress doesn't remove the enemy; it protects you from the enemy. A shelter doesn't stop the storm; it covers you during it.

The psalmist is dwelling *in* the shelter, resting *in* the shadow. Not after the danger passes. Not once everything's resolved.

In the midst of it.

This is where we learn the difference between *comfort* and *presence*. We pray for comfort—removal of difficulty. God often gives presence—companionship through difficulty.

The shadow of grace says: "I won't leave you in this alone."

In the shadow, we discover a profound truth: God doesn't give us a list of things to change in ourselves. He gives us Himself. The more we gaze at Him, the more we become aware of our need, and the more we become aware that only He can meet it.

We're not fixing ourselves—we're gazing at the One who shelters us. And in that gazing, transformation happens.

## 2. Hiding IN God vs. Hiding FROM God

There are two kinds of hiding. Understanding the difference changes everything.

**Hiding FROM** is what the first humans did after they failed. Fear-driven. Shame-motivated. Trying to avoid being seen, known, exposed. This hiding isolates us, deepens our wounds, keeps us from the very healing we need.

**Hiding IN** is what ancient poets described in their prayers. Trust-driven. Safety-seeking. Running toward shelter for covering, not away in fear. This hiding heals, restores, connects us to our true

identity.

The original writing from the blog captures this journey:

*"What can wash away my shame, or will I live forever in its grip, squeezing the very life out of my soul, leaving me to rot on the heap of humanity? Have I walked too far beyond the boundary of grace, only to look back and see nothing but emptiness, leaving me to fend for myself in this world, sliding faster and faster to death and destruction?"*

This is the voice of someone hiding FROM. Convinced they've gone too far. Believing grace has limits. Fending for themselves because they think they have to.

But then the shift:

*"But then I stop. I don't move in any direction. I bow down and listen. And I hear Your voice—just the whisper of Your voice—pleading with me to return, to simply turn around and walk."*

From hiding FROM to hiding IN. From running away to turning around. From isolation to invitation.

In the shadow of grace, we don't hide our shame—we bring it into the light of covering. We don't pretend we're okay—we admit we're not and find that the shadow is big enough to cover all of it.

Hiding IN is a practice—a lifelong habit of running toward shelter, not away from it. The way we live our lives shapes us deeply. Practice living in presence now, learning to dwell in the shadow. We learn to live in the shadow now so that we know where home is when the final shadow falls.

### **3. Psalm 91 Theology: Dwelling in the Shelter**

Psalm 91 is the bedrock text for understanding shadow grace. Let's look at the full passage:

*"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection." — Psalm 91:1-4 (NLT)*

This isn't a one-time transaction. It's a posture. *Dwelling. Resting.* Living in the shelter, not just visiting it.

Notice the progression:

- **Shelter** (protective covering)
- **Shadow** (evidence of presence)
- **Refuge and fortress** (safety from enemies)
- **Covering with feathers** (tender, intimate protection)
- **Faithfulness as shield** (character as our defense)

The protection isn't mechanical—it's relational. Like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings, the covering isn't from a distance but with nearness, with tenderness, with the warmth of presence.

*Pause and consider: What would it mean to dwell—not just visit, but live—in the shelter of what's Real?*

Oswald Chambers writes:

*"Never make the blunder of trying to forecast the way God is going to answer your prayer. God's way of answering prayer is infinitely more wonderful than our expectations. He always transcends our*

*expectations." — Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest*

We expect God to remove the danger. He gives us His shadow instead—covering us in ways infinitely more wonderful than we imagined. Not escape, but presence. Not removal, but shelter.

#### **4. Shadow as Evidence of Light**

Here's the theological richness we often miss: shadow is proof of light.

You can't have shadow without a light source. The deeper the shadow, the brighter the light casting it. So when we talk about dwelling in the shadow of grace, we're acknowledging something profound: *Reality itself is the light.*

*"The LORD is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?"  
— Psalm 27:1 (NLT)*

The shadow isn't absence of light—it's the shape light makes when it encounters the substance of divine presence. We rest in that shadow, and in doing so, we're closer to the light than we've ever been.

In the swamp, we couldn't see the light. The muck blocked it out. Darkness was all we knew.

At the water's edge, in the transition, we discover the shadow. We're not yet walking fully in the light, but we're covered by it.

The shadow proves the light is real, present, strong enough to shelter us.

The blog devotional speaks to this:

*"How do I trust after all these years? My shame is great, my faith is weak, and I'm tired. I heard You say, 'Come to Me, and I will give you rest.'"*

Rest isn't passivity. It's trust. It's the active decision to stop striving, stop performing, stop trying to earn what's already been given.

Under the covering, we learn to:

- Stop running from the shame and bring it into the shadow
- Stop trying to be strong enough and admit we're weak
- Stop hiding our doubt and confess our questions
- Stop performing faith and simply receive grace

*"Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart." — John Ortberg, The Life You've Always Wanted*

When we live in hurry, we are living in a way that says we are too busy for what matters, too busy for the people we love, too busy to notice the beauty around us.

Resting in the shadow means unhurrying our hearts. Slowing down enough to notice we're covered. Sheltered. Held. We can't experience presence at breakneck speed.

### **Want to hear what the psalmist discovered about this?**

This is the kind of rest David wrote about:

*"Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken." — Psalm 62:5-6 (NLT)*

*Find rest in God.*

Not in having everything figured out. Not in perfect circumstances. Not in the absence of trials. In God alone.

This is soul-rest. The kind of rest that comes not from the absence of struggle but from the presence of God in the struggle. You're weary, burdened, exhausted—but you're sheltered. You're in His shadow. And in that shadow, your soul can find rest.

## 6. Resting in the Mystery

The chapter outline notes: *"Someone asked me once: 'The mystery—is it ours to figure out, or to revere?' In the shadow of grace, we learn it's the latter."*

We don't have to understand everything. We don't have to have it all figured out. We don't have to explain how grace works or why God chooses to shelter us rather than remove the trial.

We just have to know we're covered. Sheltered. Held.

The shadow teaches us that ways are higher than our ways. That thoughts are not our thoughts. That there's mystery in how reality works, and that mystery isn't a problem to solve—it's an invitation to trust.

In the shadow, we stop trying to be experts who have all the answers and become children who simply rest in the arms that hold us.

A.W. Tozer beautifully expresses this tension:

*"God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is." — A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy*

The mystery isn't a problem—it's an invitation. In the shadow, we discover that not understanding everything doesn't diminish our trust. It deepens our wonder.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**Grace doesn't promise no suffering. Grace promises no suffering alone.**

This is the wayfarer truth we discover in the shadow: Reality doesn't always remove the pain, but it never leaves us in it alone.

The sun still beats down. The wilderness is still real. The journey is still hard.

In the swamp, we felt alone. Isolated. Forgotten.

## **Song Integration**

Standing in full sunlight at the height of my spiritual crisis, I wasn't basking in illumination—I was burning from exposure. Every wound visible. Every failure on display. This is the paradox the comfortable never understand: sometimes the problem isn't darkness. Sometimes the problem is too much light—too much exposure, too much harsh truth without any corresponding shelter. You can die just as surely from exposure as from darkness.

"In the Shadow of Your Grace" emerged from that scorched place. From discovering what I needed wasn't escape from reality but shelter within it. Grace doesn't always look like removal of difficulty—sometimes grace looks like covering in the midst of it.

## **Lyrics: In the Shadow of Your Grace**

[Verse 1]

I've been running, I've been hiding,

Worn out from the fight.

Tangled up in chains I fastened,



Lost inside the night.

**[Chorus]**

Oh, in the shadow of Your grace,

Every fear begins to fade.

Where mercy meets me face to face,

I am free, I'm not the same!

**[Outro]**

No more hiding, no more grave,

Hell is shaking, heaven stays!

Chains are falling, fear erased,

I am free in Jesus' name!

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Grace shelters, not just rescues.** God doesn't always remove the trial, but He covers you through it. The shadow doesn't eliminate the sun—it provides protection under it.
- **Hide IN God, not FROM God.** Running toward shelter is faith; running from exposure is fear. Bring your shame into the shadow of grace where it's covered, not hidden.
- **Shadow is proof of light.** You can't have shadow without a light source. Resting in God's shadow means you're closer to His presence than you've ever been.
- **Dwelling is different from visiting.** Psalm 91 invites you to live in the shelter, not just stop by in crisis. Make presence your primary residence, not your emergency contact.

## **Reflections for the Road**

### **Questions for the Journey:**

#### **1. Where are you seeking escape when God might be offering shelter?**

What trial are you begging to have removed? What if, instead of removing it, you're being invited to experience presence in it? How might that shift your prayer?

#### **2. Are you hiding FROM or IN?**

Be honest: What are you afraid will be seen if you come close? What shame are you carrying that keeps you at a distance?

Remember: The shadow of grace is for the ashamed. The broken. The weary. Come as you are.

#### **3. What does dwelling (not just visiting) in shelter look like for you?**

Psalm 91 talks about dwelling—making your home—in shelter. Not dropping by when you need something. Not visiting in crisis. Living there.

What would change if you made presence your primary residence instead of your emergency contact?

### **Closing Image**

You're still at the water's edge. The journey isn't over. There's more road ahead, more wilderness to cross, more unknowns to face.

But something has changed.

The heat is still real. The sun still beats down. The journey is still hard.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 7)

## MOVEMENT 2: AT THE WATER'S EDGE (The Turning)

### Chapter 7: Amazing Grace I Did Receive

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." — Ephesians 2:8*

Amazing Grace

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylertthomas.com/UCBWc5>



*Scan to listen: Amazing Grace*

### An Invitation to Receive

You've walked through six chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out, decided, died to the old, stepped into the water, and discovered grace shelters you in the wilderness.

But here's a question that might make you uncomfortable:

**Do you really believe you're worthy of this? Do you believe grace is actually for you?**

Because if you're honest, part of you is still keeping score. Still calculating whether you've done enough, been good enough, believed hard enough to deserve what you're receiving.

Part of you is still trying to earn it.

And that's the problem. Because what comes next—what you're about to encounter in this chapter—can't be earned. Can't be deserved. Can't be worked for or achieved.

It can only be received.

Grace is the most offensive word in the language because it says: "You're getting this for free, and there's nothing you can do about it."

No performance required. No goodness quota. No earning your way in.

Just... receiving.

So I need to ask you: **Can you let go of trying to deserve it? Can you stop calculating your worthiness? Can you simply open your hands and receive what's being freely given?**

This is harder than it sounds. Because receiving grace means admitting you're the kind of person who needs it. Not someone mostly good who stumbled. Not someone who tried their best. But someone who absolutely, categorically doesn't deserve it.

A wretch, in fact.

And grace says: "That's exactly who this is for."

Before you continue reading, pause. Consider:

*Can you say, even if it feels scandalous: "God, I don't deserve this. I can't earn it. I can't repay it. But I'm opening my hands to receive it*

*anyway. Amazing grace—for a wretch like me."*

That's the prayer that opens the door.

Because what comes next isn't about what you've done or who you've been. It's about what Love does for those who don't deserve it.

Keep reading. Because what comes next might offend you—or it might save you.

You know the feeling when you realize you've been given something you absolutely don't deserve?

Not a small gift. Not a favor you could repay. But something so extravagant, so unearned, so wildly disproportionate to anything you've done that it stops you in your tracks.

That's grace.

And here's what makes it so hard to receive: we've been conditioned to believe grace is for people who are mostly good. People who stumbled a little but tried their best. People who deserve a second chance because they've earned it through effort.

But that's not grace. That's mercy. That's fairness. That's getting what we've worked for.

Grace is for wretches.

Not people who stumbled—people who ran. Not people who tried their best—people who didn't even try. Not people who deserve it—people who absolutely, categorically, objectively do not.

*"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."*

Not a mostly-good person. A wretch.

This chapter is about receiving what you don't deserve. About standing at the edge of clean water while still covered in swamp mud and discovering: the water isn't waiting for you to clean up first.

The water is what cleans you up.

The writing that follows came from my encounter with scandalous grace. When I'd trampled on every gift, ignored every warning, chosen my way instead of the right way—and discovered grace wasn't done with me.

Grace, in fact, had just begun.

## Key Themes

### 1. The Scandal of Grace: For the Undeserving

Grace is scandalous precisely because it's for people who don't deserve it. If you deserved it, it wouldn't be grace—it would be payment. A transaction. You do X, you get Y.

But grace isn't a transaction. It's a gift. Freely given to those who can never earn it, never repay it, never deserve it.

This offends us. Deeply.

Because we've been trained to believe you get what you earn. Work hard, get rewarded. Mess up, face consequences. The world runs on merit, on fairness, on getting what you deserve.

But grace shatters that entire system.

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9:

*"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." — Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*

Not by works. Not by trying harder. Not by cleaning yourself up first. By grace. Through faith. A gift.

### **Want to hear a story that captures this perfectly?**

There's a story about a prophet named Jonah. He received a clear call from God: go to Nineveh and call the people to repentance. But Jonah fled in the opposite direction, boarding a ship to Tarshish. He thought he could outrun God, create his own path, define his own freedom.

This is our human condition—we hear what's true, but our hearts are afraid, prideful, stubborn. We think we know better. We convince ourselves that our version of freedom will bring fulfillment.

When Jonah fled, he wasn't seeking freedom—he was seeking autonomy. Control. The right to write his own story without interference. And that path led him straight into the belly of a fish, trapped in the very darkness he'd been trying to escape.

In that belly, in that darkness, Jonah cried out:

*"I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and LORD, you heard me!" — Jonah 2:2 (NLT)*

He didn't clean himself up first. Didn't earn the right to be heard. From the grave of his own making, from the consequences of his own rebellion, he cried out.

And God answered.

That's the scandal. God doesn't wait for us to deserve rescue. He rescues us while we're still in the belly of the whale.

Philip Yancey writes powerfully about this scandal:

*"Grace is the most dangerous, revolutionary, unexpected, and free force the world has ever seen or will ever see. It is wild and uncontrollable. When people taste it, they become addicted to it." — Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?*

Grace is dangerous precisely because it refuses to play by our rules. It doesn't wait for worthiness. It doesn't demand payment. It just gives—freely, scandalously, outrageously.

## 2. Trading True Freedom for False Freedom

The writing from the blog captures this perfectly:

*"I traded it in for my version of freedom / Ruling others from my own throne / Instead of following the Master's plan / I wrote one of my own."*

We think freedom means autonomy. No rules. No boundaries. No one telling us what to do. We sit on our self-made thrones and convince ourselves we're liberated.

But autonomy isn't freedom. It's slavery in disguise.

When we attempt to rule our own lives without what's Real guiding us, we don't escape constraints—we just exchange life-giving boundaries for the soul-crushing bondage of our own making. We become enslaved to our appetites. Our pride. Our need to control. Our fear of being exposed.

The freedom we think we've found leads us down a dead-end path.

And at the end of that path? A grave. Not physical death necessarily, but spiritual death. Isolation. Emptiness. The slow suffocation of a soul trying to live on its own terms.

Real freedom isn't found in throwing off all restraints. Real freedom is found in surrender.

*"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free." —  
John 8:36 (NLT)*

Not freedom to do whatever we want. Freedom to become who we were created to be. Freedom from the tyranny of self. Freedom to live in the flow of love instead of fighting against it.



Timothy Keller captures this paradox:

*"The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time." —  
Timothy Keller, The Prodigal God*

True freedom isn't found in ruling our own throne—it's found in bowing before the only One who died to set us free. That's the freedom Jonah discovered in the belly of the fish, the freedom that leads us from the grave to the water's edge.

The pathway to this freedom is counterintuitive: it requires us to step off our dead-end road and run toward the very One we've been fleeing from.

### **3. From the Grave to the Water's Edge**

- *"The freedom I was living / Turned out to make me a slave"*
- *"Rather than bringing life to me / It buried me in my own grave"*
- *"He led me down a dead end path / So He could show me His vision"*
- *"It stopped way short of the water of life / And I had to make a decision"*

God doesn't usually intervene the moment we start running. He lets us run. Lets the path we've chosen reveal its true nature. Lets us reach the dead end.

Not because He's cruel. Because that's when we're finally ready to listen.

As long as we think our path might work, we won't turn around. But when we hit the wall, when the road dead-ends, when we're standing in a grave of our own making—that's when grace becomes not just nice

but necessary.

And at that dead end, there's a choice: turn around or stay buried.

The water of life is right there. Close enough to see. Close enough to reach. But there's a gap between the dead-end road and the water's edge. And crossing that gap requires a decision.

*Pause and consider: Where has your self-made path led you? What dead end are you facing?*

Will we stay on the familiar path, even though it's killing us? Or will we step off into the unknown, trusting that Love will catch us?

#### **4. The Decision: Fleeing or Embracing**

*"Would I turn around and walk away / Fleeing from the water's edge / Or would I leave my road and run to Him / Embracing His freedom pledge"*

This is the hinge moment. The turning point. Everything comes down to this choice.

Grace is offered. The water is there. The invitation is extended. But grace must be received. We have to choose to step toward it.

And here's what's so tender about this moment: God doesn't force us. He invites. He calls. He stands at the water's edge with arms open. But He waits for us to come.

Why? Because love that's forced isn't love. Rescue that's imposed isn't freedom.

God wants relationship, not robots. So He offers grace and waits for our response.

The wayfarer in the story makes the choice: "I stepped off that dead end road / And simply trusted He would save."

Notice the word: simply. Not "I cleaned myself up and then approached." Not "I proved I was worthy and then stepped forward." Simply trusted.

That's all grace requires. Not perfection. Not performance. Just trust.

Trust that God is who He says He is. Trust that grace is real. Trust that the water won't reject you.

## **5. The Lifting: God's Hand Raises Us**

*"With each step I took, I felt His hand / Lifting me out of my grave"*

This is the miracle of grace. We step toward the water, and God's hand meets us. We take one step of faith, and He carries us the rest of the way.

We don't pull ourselves out of the grave. We can't. We're dead in it.

But when we trust—when we simply turn toward the water and step—God's hand reaches down and lifts us out.

Paul captures this in Ephesians 2:4-5:

*"But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)" — Ephesians 2:4-5 (NLT)*

That's resurrection language. That's dead-to-life language. That's grace language.

You can't resurrect yourself. You can only be resurrected. And that's what God does when you step toward the water. He doesn't just wash you. He raises you.

From death to life. From grave to grace. From wretch to beloved.

## 6. Addressing Objections: Cheap Grace vs. Costly Grace

Whenever we talk about grace being free, unearned, and given to the undeserving, someone will object: "But doesn't that make grace cheap? Doesn't that give people license to sin?"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer addressed this in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He distinguished between cheap grace and costly grace.

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship. Grace without transformation. Grace that says, "You're forgiven, so keep living however you want." It's grace as a Get Out of Jail Free card that you pocket and then go back to your old life.

Costly grace is grace that costs God everything—the life of His Son on the cross—and costs us everything too. Not to earn it, but as a response to it. When you truly encounter grace, it doesn't leave you unchanged. It transforms you.

Bonhoeffer writes:

*"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has." — Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship*

The grace we encounter at the water's edge is costly—not in what we pay to receive it, but in what it cost Christ to offer it, and in how completely it transforms us when we truly receive it.

Costly grace says: "You're forgiven, and because of that, you're free to become who you were always meant to be. Not by striving, but by

surrendering. Not by performing, but by receiving and then living out of the abundance of what you've received."

The grace extended at the water's edge is costly grace. It cost Jesus His life. And it will cost us our old life—the one built on autonomy and self-rule. But what we gain in exchange is life itself. Real life. Abundant life. Eternal life.

## **The Core Scripture Truth**

Let's unpack this verse phrase by phrase, because it changes everything.

Grace is the means. Not effort. Not goodness. Not trying really hard. Grace.

And notice the tense: "have been saved." It's done. Accomplished. Complete. You're not trying to get saved. If you're in Christ, you are saved. Present reality, not future hope.

### **"Through faith":**

Faith is the instrument. The way grace is received. Not works, but trust. Belief. Reliance on God's promise rather than your own ability.

Faith isn't the same as perfection. You don't have to have perfect faith to be saved. You just have to have faith—even mustard-seed-sized faith—in a perfect Savior.

### **"And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God":**

This is crucial. Both the salvation and the faith are gifts. You can't even take credit for believing. God gives the grace. God gives the faith. You receive.

Why does Paul emphasize this? Because our default mode is to try to contribute something. To earn a little bit. To prove we're worthy. But grace, by definition, can't be earned. The moment you think you've

contributed to your salvation, you've moved from grace to works. And works can't save.

**"Not by works, so that no one can boast":**

If salvation were by works, then the people who did the most works would have bragging rights. They'd be "better Christians" than those who did fewer works.

But in grace, there's no hierarchy. The apostle Paul and the thief on the cross stand before God on the same footing: utterly dependent on grace.

No one can boast. Not about how good they are. Not about how hard they tried. Not about how much they've done for God.

We can only boast in this: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

Andrew Murray beautifully expresses this:

*"The first link between my soul and Christ is not my goodness but my badness, not my merit but my misery, not my standing but my falling, not my riches but my need." — Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ*

We don't come to grace because we're good enough. We come because we're desperate enough. And that desperation—that acknowledgment of our wretchedness—is the beginning of transformation.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**When grace stops being doctrine and becomes your story.**

You can know the theology of grace—memorize Ephesians 2:8-9, understand justification by faith, articulate the difference between cheap and costly grace—and still not experience grace.

Because grace isn't just a doctrine. It's an encounter.

The wayfarer moment is when you stop understanding grace in the abstract and start experiencing it in the specific. When it's not just "God loves the world" but "God loves me." Not just "Jesus died for sinners" but "Jesus died for me."

The wayfarer moment came when they stood at the dead end of their self-made path and heard the whisper: "Turn around. The water is here. Just trust Me."

Not theological theory. Personal history.

## **Song Integration**

The first time I truly understood John Newton's "Amazing Grace," I was standing at a dead end of my own making, and the word "wretch" suddenly stopped being offensive and started being honest. This isn't a song about minor mistakes. This is about moral catastrophe, actively participating in your own destruction, deserving condemnation and receiving grace instead.

To understand this hymn, you need to know who wrote it. John Newton was a slave trader. He commanded ships transporting kidnapped Africans across the Atlantic in horrific conditions. He profited from human suffering on an industrial scale. When a violent storm nearly sank his ship in 1748, Newton cried out to God. That moment began a long transformation—but even after his conversion, he continued in the slave trade for years. Only later, after entering ministry, did he become an active abolitionist, working with William Wilberforce to end the slave trade in Britain. When Newton called himself a wretch, he wasn't being dramatic. He was being factual.

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Grace is for wretches, not nice people.** If you deserved it, it wouldn't be grace—it would be payment. The scandal is that God loves you while you're still a mess, not after you clean up.
- **You traded true freedom for false freedom.** Autonomy isn't liberty—it's slavery in disguise. Real freedom comes through surrender to the One who died to set you free.
- **Grace is costly, not cheap.** It cost Christ His life and will cost you your old life built on self-rule. But what you gain is life itself—abundant, eternal, real.
- **Your dead-end road is grace's invitation.** When your self-made path stops short of living water, that's not failure—it's God showing you where the real source is. Step off and run toward it.

## Reflections for the Road

### Questions for the Journey:

#### 1. Where are you trading true freedom for false freedom?

What self-made throne are you sitting on? Where are you trying to write your own plan instead of following what's true? Be specific. Name it. Because you can't step off a path you won't admit you're on.

#### 2. What dead-end road has life let you travel to show you its true nature?

Sometimes we have to exhaust our own options before we're ready to receive what's offered. Where has your path dead-ended? And what is being shown to you from that vantage point?

#### 3. What's keeping you from stepping toward the water's edge?

Is it shame? The belief that you've gone too far? The fear that grace has limits and you've exceeded them? Name the obstacle. Bring it into



the light. Because shame loses its power when it's spoken aloud.

## **Closing Image**

You're standing in the water now. Not all the way in yet—just ankle-deep. But you're in.

And the water is exactly what was promised. Living. Flowing. Clean.

The mud from the swamp is starting to wash away. Not all at once, but gradually. With each step deeper, more of it lifts off and is carried downstream.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 8)

## MOVEMENT 2: AT THE WATER'S EDGE (The Turning)

### Chapter 8: Dig a Little Deeper

*"They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream." — Jeremiah 17:8*

Dig a Little Deeper

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylertthomas.com/i0kY88>



*Scan to listen: Dig a Little Deeper*

### An Invitation to Go Deeper

You've journeyed through seven chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out, decided, died to the old, stepped into living water, found shelter in grace, and received what you don't deserve.

You've been washed. The surface mud is gone. You look better. Smell better. Function better.

**Are you willing to let grace go deeper than the surface?**

It's like the sign in the doctor's office: "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be well?"

You can wash off the mud and still carry the wounds underneath. You can look healed on the outside while the infection still festers inside. You can function well while the scar tissue hides the pain you've never actually dealt with.

Grace doesn't just want to clean you up. Grace wants to heal you from the inside out. And that requires digging—opening wounds you've spent years protecting, feeling pain you've been numbing, facing truths you've been avoiding.

**Here's the hard truth nobody tells you upfront: You can't heal what you won't feel. And you can't feel what you keep buried.**

This chapter is about excavation. About going beneath the surface to the deep places where real transformation happens.

And I'm not going to lie to you—it's terrifying. It's going to hurt. You're going to want to stop halfway through and just settle for looking clean on the outside.

But if you're willing—if you can say, even with fear, "God, I don't want to just look healed, I want to BE healed. Dig as deep as You need to"—then what comes next will transform you from the inside out.

**Are you ready to go deeper? To let grace excavate not just your behavior but your heart? To dig through the scar tissue until you hit bedrock truth?**

If yes, take a breath and keep reading.

This is where transformation stops being surface-level and starts becoming soul-level.

There's a difference between clean and healed.

You can wash off the surface mud—the visible stains, the obvious filth, the stuff everyone can see. The water does that quickly. You step in. The dirt rinses away. You look clean.

But underneath? That's where the real work begins.

Underneath the surface are the wounds you've carried for years. The scar tissue that formed over the original pain. The coping mechanisms you developed to survive. The defense strategies that became so automatic you forgot you were using them. The ways of numbing, avoiding, performing, pretending that protected you from feeling the full weight of what happened.

The surface dirt washes away easily. The scar tissue? That requires excavation.

This chapter is about the moment you realize: if you want real healing—not just cleaning, but healing—you're going to have to go deeper.

You're going to have to dig.

Digging is terrifying. Underneath the scar tissue is the original wound. The one you've been protecting for years. The one that still hurts when you accidentally brush against it in the middle of the night.

To heal that wound, you have to open it again. You have to cut through the scar tissue, drain the toxins, let air and light reach the infection that's been festering in the dark.

You can't numb this. Real healing requires you to feel. To face. To dig.

The writing that follows came from my season of excavation. When I discovered that time doesn't heal all wounds—it just buries them deeper. The only way to true healing was through the pain I'd been avoiding for years.

Grace doesn't just wash the surface. Grace goes deep. All the way down to the bedrock truth of who you are beneath the wounds, beneath

the scars, beneath the lies you've believed about yourself.

But you have to let it.

You have to dig.

## Key Themes

### 1. The Depths of Grace: How Wide, How Long, How High, How Deep

The Apostle Paul prays one of the most beautiful prayers in Scripture in Ephesians 3:

*"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God." — Ephesians 3:18-19 (NLT)*

How wide? Wide enough to reach every person, every nation, every generation. No one is outside the reach of this love.

How long? Long enough to span eternity. From before the foundation of the world to forever. This love has no beginning and no end.

How high? High enough to lift us from the lowest pit to the highest heights. From death to life. From slave to heir.

How deep? This is where it gets personal. Deep enough to reach the deepest wound, the darkest shame, the most hidden brokenness.

Grace doesn't skim the surface. It goes all the way down. Down to the root. Down to the original pain. Down to the place you've been protecting for years because you're terrified that if anyone—including

God—sees it, you'll be rejected.

But grace isn't afraid of your depth.

Grace says: "Show me the wound. I know how to heal it."

Philip Yancey writes:

*"Grace, like water, flows to the lowest part. The gospel's good news is that God loves us not because of our infinite worth, but in spite of our infinite unworthiness." — Philip Yancey, The Jesus I Never Knew*

Grace doesn't wait at the surface for us to climb up. It descends—all the way down to the lowest, darkest, most wounded places.

That's where grace does its deepest work.

## **2. Spiritual Formation as Excavation, Not Construction**

We tend to think of spiritual growth as building something. Adding disciplines. Improving behavior. Constructing a better version of ourselves.

But that's not how it works.

Spiritual formation is more like archaeology than architecture. Excavation, not construction.

You're not building a new self from scratch. You're uncovering your true self—the image of the Divine that's been buried under layers of wounds, lies, and false beliefs.

Dallas Willard writes in *Renovation of the Heart*:

*"Actions are not impositions on who we are, but are expressions of who we are. They come out of our heart and the inner realities it supervises and interacts with." — Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart*

Who you are at the core—created in love's image, beloved, chosen, redeemed—is already true. But it's buried. Hidden under layers of pain and protection.

Digging deeper means removing what doesn't belong so the truth can emerge.

Think of a sculptor chipping away marble to reveal the statue that's been there all along. The sculptor doesn't create the statue from nothing. The statue is already in the marble. The work is removing everything that isn't the statue.

That's what digging deeper does. It removes the false beliefs, the protective layers, the scar tissue—not to create something new, but to reveal what's always been true underneath.

Thomas Merton understood this deeply:

*"There is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace, and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him." — Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain*

Excavation isn't just about removing what's false—it's about uncovering who we truly are. The two discoveries are one journey.

### **3. Digging Through the Layers**

The journey inward follows a pattern. Not everyone goes through these layers in the same order, but most of us encounter them:

#### **Layer 1: Performance**

On the surface, we perform. We present the version of ourselves we think will be acceptable. We wear masks. Manage impressions. Work hard to look good, sound good, appear to have it together.

This is exhausting. Performance is never finished. You can never rest. Always have to be "on."

## **Layer 2: Shame**

Underneath performance is shame. The voice that says: "If they really knew me, they'd reject me. If they saw the real me—messy, broken, failing—they'd turn away."

Shame is what drives performance. We perform because we're ashamed of what we think people will see if we stop performing.

## **Layer 3: Wounds**

Underneath shame are the wounds. The things that happened to us. The ways we were hurt, betrayed, abandoned, abused. The traumas, large and small, that marked us.

Wounds aren't our fault. They're what was done to us. But they shape us. They create patterns of response—fight, flight, freeze, fawn—that become so automatic we don't realize we're doing them.

## **Layer 4: False Beliefs**

Underneath the wounds are the false beliefs. The conclusions we drew from the wounds about ourselves, about others, about reality.

"I'm not good enough."

"Every statement is a criticism."

"Responses are always taken the wrong way."

"I have to be intense or I won't be taken seriously."

"If I'm not perfect, I'll be abandoned."

These beliefs formed in moments of pain. And they've been running our lives ever since.



*What false beliefs have you been living under? What lies sound like truth because you've heard them so long?*

### **Layer 5: Bedrock Truth**

You are loved. You are worthy. You are enough. You are beloved.

This truth was true before the wounds. It remained true through the wounds. And it's true now, underneath all the layers.

Digging deeper means excavating through performance, shame, wounds, and false beliefs until you hit bedrock. Until you touch the truth of who you actually are.

## **4. Finding Treasure Buried in the Depths**

Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 13:

*"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field." — Matthew 13:44 (NLT)*

Once you find it, you'll give up everything to possess it. Not out of obligation. Out of joy.

That's what digging deeper does. It helps you find the treasure that's been there all along—your true self, your real identity, the image of love in you—and once you find it, you'll gladly let go of everything else.

The performance? Exhausting. Let it go.

The shame? A lie. Let it go.

The false beliefs? Not bedrock. Let them go.

What remains is who you've always been, underneath:

Beloved.

Eugene Peterson writes:

*"The minute we begin moving away from Scripture to discover the will of God, we enter the world of guesswork and magic and manipulation. The Bible is God's revelation to us, revealing who God is and who we are and what we are called to do." — Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

Digging deeper means going back to bedrock truth—not our opinions, not our feelings, but what reality reveals about who we are. That's the treasure buried in the field.

## 5. Surface Religion vs. Deep Transformation

Jesus had no patience for surface religion. He called out the religious leaders repeatedly for their performance—they looked good on the outside, rotten inside.

*"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too."*  
— Matthew 23:25-26 (NLT)

Surface religion focuses on the outside: behavior, appearance, performance. It's about looking good to others.

Deep transformation focuses on the inside: the heart, the motives, the beliefs that drive behavior.

You can clean up your behavior without touching your heart. You can look like a "good person" on the outside while still being driven by shame, fear, and false beliefs inside.

Digging deeper means going to the heart. Letting Love excavate not just your actions but your affections. Not just your habits but your desires.

Paul captures this in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*"So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." — 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)*

Transformation. Not behavior modification. Not surface cleaning. Transformation from the inside out.

And it comes not from our striving but from beholding. From contemplating Love's glory with unveiled faces—no masks, no performance, just face-to-face encounter with what's Real.

When we dig deep enough to remove the veils, the transformation happens. Not because we're trying harder. Because we're seeing more clearly.

A.W. Tozer captures this beautifully:

*"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God." — A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy*

Surface religion settles for low thoughts—a manageable concept that confirms our preferences. Deep transformation requires digging down to encounter what's truly Real—infinite, holy, transcendent, and yet intimately near. When we behold rightly, we cannot remain unchanged.

## The Core Scripture Truth

*"If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me."  
— Jeremiah 29:13 (NLT)*

God isn't hiding from you. He's not playing games, making Himself difficult to find so only the spiritually elite can reach Him.

But He is deep. And finding Him requires going deep.

"With all your heart." Not with half. Not with the surface layer. With all of it. The whole thing. The wounds and the shame and the false beliefs and the raw, unfiltered need.

When you seek Him there—in the depths, not just the shallows—you find Him. And when you find Him, you discover He's been there all along. In the deep. Waiting for you to stop protecting yourself long enough to let Him in.

This isn't about earning presence by being vulnerable enough. It's about discovering that Love's presence is already there, in the depths, and the work is removing the barriers we've erected to keep it (and everyone else) out.

## The Wayfarer Moment

**Grace on the surface is wonderful. Grace in the depths is life-changing.**

You can experience grace on the surface. You can know you're forgiven. You can feel the relief of being washed. You can taste the living water.

But if you never dig deeper—if you stay in the shallows, protecting the depths—you'll miss the fullness of what grace offers.

Because grace doesn't just want to clean you. Grace wants to heal you. And healing requires depth.

I'm going to dig. Open the wound. Let it drain. I'm going to invite healing into the deepest, most protected places and trust that grace is sufficient even there.

But here's the promise: you don't dig alone. Love is the excavator. It has the skill to go deep without destroying you. It knows exactly how deep to dig and exactly how to heal what it uncovers.

God has the insight. He knows how to draw out what's buried. And when He does, transformation happens. Not surface transformation. Deep, lasting, bedrock transformation.

## **Song Integration**

"Time heals all wounds"—it sounds like truth until you discover something painful: time doesn't heal wounds. Time just buries them deeper under layers of scar tissue until we've convinced ourselves we're fine when we're actually just numb.

"Dig a Little Deeper" emerged from that season of excavation—when I learned you can't heal what you won't feel, and you can't feel what you keep buried.

## **Lyrics: Dig a Little Deeper**

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Time doesn't heal wounds—proper treatment does.** Scars can fool you into thinking you're healed when you're just covered up. Real healing requires excavation, not just waiting.

- **You can't heal what you won't feel.** To heal deep wounds, you must cut through scar tissue, open the pain, drain the infection, and let grace reach what's been buried.
- **Transformation is excavation, not construction.** You're not building a new self—you're uncovering your true self by removing layers of wounds, shame, and false beliefs until you hit bedrock truth.
- **The deepest truth is your belovedness.** Beneath all the layers—performance, shame, wounds, lies—is the unchanging reality: you are loved, worthy, and enough because God says so.

## Reflections for the Road

### Questions for the Journey:

#### 1. What scar tissue are you carrying that's masking as healing?

Where have you learned to function around a wound without actually healing it? Where are you telling yourself "I'm fine" when really you're just numb?

#### 2. What would it look like to dig a little deeper in your relationship with God?

Are you keeping Him at the surface level? Sharing edited versions of yourself? What would it take to invite Him into the depths—the wounds, the shame, the false beliefs?

#### 3. Who are the safe people in your life who can help you dig?

You can't do this alone. Who can you trust to sit with you in the pain without trying to fix it too quickly? If you don't have anyone, who could you ask God to bring into your life?

## **Closing Image**

You're in the water now, and it's deeper than before. Not ankle-deep anymore. Waist-deep. The current is stronger here, pulling at you, but also holding you.

And you're doing something you've never done before: you're digging. Not on dry land where you can control the excavation. In the water. Letting the current carry away what you unearth.

You dig through performance—the mask you've worn for so long it feels like your face. You lift it off and hand it to the current. It floats away downstream.

## Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Movement 3)

### MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

*"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?  
Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover  
your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk  
with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn  
the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything  
heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and  
you'll learn to live freely and lightly." — Matthew  
11:28-30 (The Message)*

The crisis is over. The rescue has happened. The water has washed you clean.

But now what?

Most of us assume that once we're out of the swamp and through the water's edge, we've arrived. Crisis averted. Problem solved. Time to get back to normal life.

But here's what we discover: there is no going back to normal. Because "normal" was the life that led us to the swamp in the first place.

What we need isn't a return to the old patterns. We need new rhythms entirely. Rhythms that don't produce swamps. Rhythms that sustain life instead of draining it. Rhythms that flow naturally from grace instead of grinding against it.

*Unforced rhythms.*



Not the frenetic pace of performance. Not the exhausting treadmill of religious striving. Not the constant pressure to prove, produce, and perform.

Rhythms. Natural. Sustainable. Life-giving.

The kind that fit with how you were actually made to live.

Here's the hard truth: Most of us have been in survival mode so long, we've forgotten there's another way to live.

Survival is getting through. Transformation is growing into.

Survival is crisis management. Transformation is intentional cultivation.

Survival asks, "How do I make it through today?" Transformation asks, "What kind of life am I building?"

In the swamp, survival was the only option. You were drowning—just trying to breathe, trying to keep your head above water, trying to make it one more day without completely falling apart.

At the water's edge, you moved from drowning to breathing. From desperation to hope. From death to life. But you were still focused on immediate needs—getting clean, finding healing, experiencing rescue.

But this? This is different.

This is learning to live beyond crisis. To build a life that doesn't just react to emergencies but actually grows toward something. To develop rhythms that sustain you not just in the hard seasons, but in every season.

This is where transformation happens. Not in the dramatic moment of crisis or the pivotal encounter at the shoreline, but in the steady, daily rhythm of learning to walk with God.

You've left the swamp. You've been washed at the water's edge. Now you're learning what it means to live—really live—in the unforced

rhythms of grace.

And this is where everything changes. Not all at once. But day by day.  
Breath by breath. Step by step.

### **The Journey Into Rhythm:**

**Chapter 9: Unforced Rhythms of Grace** - The shift from frenzy to rhythm, from performance to presence. What does it mean to work from rest instead of toward it? To build a sustainable spiritual life that doesn't burn out because it was never built on hype in the first place? This is about manna—daily bread, daily grace. About discovering that grace provides the stable foundation beneath life's natural fluctuations.

#### Mindful Bliss of Grace

**Chapter 10: Deep Roots, Strong Growth** - Like a tree planted by streams of water, transformation happens underground before it's visible above the surface. This is the hidden work of spiritual formation—putting to death what doesn't belong (pride, reactivity, isolation, bitterness) and cultivating what does (humility, responsiveness, connection, forgiveness). Deep roots don't guarantee constant productivity, but they do guarantee sustainable fruitfulness over time.

#### I Will Trust You Lord

**Chapter 11: Redemption's Story** - Your story isn't separate from the larger story—it's woven into it. From creation through fall through redemption toward restoration. The pain has purpose. The waiting has meaning. The struggle isn't random. Every chapter of your life, even the broken ones, fits into the narrative of grace.

#### Redemption Story

**Chapter 12: Nothing is Wasted** - In grace's economy, nothing is wasted. Not "almost nothing." Nothing. Every tear, every failure, every lost year, every broken relationship. This is the scandalous promise that what seems irredeemable can be redeemed. Abraham on

Mount Moriah. Joseph from pit to palace. Your timeline viewed through the lens of grace.

Nothing is Wasted

**Chapter 13: Devil's On The Run** - There's a fundamental shift that happens when you stop fighting for victory and start fighting from victory. Jesus didn't just survive the enemy's attack—He disarmed him, made a public spectacle of him, triumphed over every power of darkness. You learn to fight from rest instead of from fear, to resist from confidence instead of from desperation.

Devil's On The Run

**Chapter 14: Living in the Moment** - Most of us live everywhere except the present moment. Replaying yesterday's conversations. Rehearsing tomorrow's scenarios. Carrying the weight of past mistakes and borrowing future worries. This is about learning to be present—to fix your eyes on what's Real instead of on what was or what might be. To trust that this moment, with sufficient grace, is enough.

This Moment is Enough

These six chapters don't offer a program to complete. They offer a way to walk. A rhythm to learn. A life to live.

Not perfectly. Not without stumbling. But with a new kind of stability. Because the roots are going deep. The rhythms are becoming established. The transformation is happening—not in dramatic crisis moments, but in the steady, daily choosing to walk with grace instead of against it.

*Pause and consider: What would it mean to stop surviving and start thriving? To stop reacting and start cultivating? To stop grinding and start resting?*

The swamp taught you honesty. The water's edge taught you grace. Now the rhythm teaches you sustainability.

This is where faith becomes a way of life instead of a series of desperate rescues. Where spiritual life stops being exhausting and starts being life-giving. Where you discover that grace isn't just the emergency intervention—it's the daily bread. The morning-by-morning manna. The unforced way of living that doesn't burn out.

You've made it through the swamp. You've stepped into the water. Now you're discovering what it means to let grace carry you—to live in the rhythms you were designed for all along.

Welcome to the unforced rhythms of grace.

This is where transformation happens.

## Entering This Movement

You're standing in a different place now than when you started this book.

Look back for a moment. Not with regret or nostalgia, but with recognition:

**Movement 1: The Swamp** - You learned to be honest. You named where you were. You cried out for help. You made the decision to accept rescue. You let something die. That wasn't easy. But it was necessary.

**Movement 2: The Water's Edge** - You encountered grace. You were washed. You discovered shadow and shelter. You received amazing grace. You dug deeper. You learned that grace is scandalous, relentless, sufficient. That wasn't comfortable. But it was transforming.

Now you're here. Movement 3. And the question shifts:

Not "How do I survive?" (That was the swamp.)

Not "How do I receive grace?" (That was the water's edge.)

But **"How do I live?"**

How do I build a life that doesn't produce swamps? How do I develop rhythms that sustain instead of drain? How do I walk forward in a way that doesn't collapse back into crisis?

This is the movement of integration. Of sustainable formation. Of learning to live from grace instead of toward it.

**What makes this movement different:**

In the swamp, everything was urgent. Desperate. Life-or-death. You were in survival mode.

At the water's edge, everything was encounter. Discovery. Relief. You were experiencing rescue and healing.

But here? Here everything is rhythm. Cultivation. Consistency. You're learning to live.

And that requires something different from you.

Not the dramatic cry for help. Not the overwhelming experience of grace washing over you.

But the steady, daily choice to walk in rhythm. To send roots deep. To trust the story. To believe nothing is wasted. To fight from victory. To be present.

This is harder in some ways. Because it's not dramatic. It's daily.

But it's also where real transformation happens. Not in the crisis moment or the mountain-top experience, but in the unforced rhythms of everyday faithfulness.

**The metaphor: From Running to Walking**

In the swamp, you were running—frantic, panicked, desperate to escape.

At the water's edge, you stopped running. You stood still. You let yourself be held, washed, healed.

But now you're learning to walk. Not running from crisis. Not standing still in relief. But walking—one foot in front of the other, step by step, breath by breath.

Walking has rhythm. It's not urgent. It's not static. It's movement with cadence. Sustainable. Steady. Natural.

That's what these six chapters teach: the walk. The rhythm. The unforced way of living that doesn't burn out because it was never built on urgency or hype in the first place.

### **Before You Enter These Chapters:**

Take a moment to acknowledge the shift you're making.

You're not in crisis anymore. (Thank God.) But that also means the adrenaline is gone. The urgency that carried you through the swamp and propelled you to the water's edge—that intensity won't sustain you here.

Here, you need something different: faithfulness. Consistency. Rhythm. The willingness to show up day after day, even when it doesn't feel dramatic.

Can you do that?

Can you trade the intensity of crisis for the steadiness of rhythm?

Can you trust that transformation happens not just in breakthrough moments, but in the daily faithfulness of putting one foot in front of the other?

If you can, you're ready for Movement 3.

If you're not sure yet, that's okay too. These chapters will teach you. Step by step. Breath by breath. One rhythm at a time.

*Welcome to the unforced rhythms of grace. This is where you learn to live beyond crisis—not just surviving, but thriving. Not just rescued, but rooted. Not just healed, but whole.*

*When you're ready, turn to Chapter 9: Unforced Rhythms of Grace.*

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 9)

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

### Chapter 9: Unforced Rhythms of Grace

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest... Learn from me... and you  
will find rest for your souls." — Matthew 11:28-29*

Mindful Bliss of Grace

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylerthomas.com/jYgQNf>



*Scan to listen: Mindful Bliss of Grace*

### An Invitation to Rest

You've walked through eight chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out for help, made a decision, let something die, stepped into living water, found shelter in grace's shadow, received what you don't deserve, and dug deep to let healing reach the wounds.



You've experienced dramatic grace. Life-changing encounters. Rescue. Cleansing. Healing.

**Are you exhausted from trying to maintain the intensity?**

Because here's what happens after the crisis: We try to keep the fire burning through sheer effort and willpower. We pray longer. Read more. Volunteer for everything. We assume that sustaining grace requires the same intensity as receiving it.

And we almost crash again. Different swamp, same drowning.

Here's what I've discovered: **Grace isn't meant to be lived in constant crisis mode.**

The swamp taught you honesty. The water's edge taught you grace. But now? Now you're learning something that might feel revolutionary—or maybe even scandalous:

**You don't have to keep performing. You can rest. Even while you're working.**

It's about discovering that grace offers rhythm—a sustainable way of walking with God that actually fits with how you're made. Not manufactured intensity. Not constant peak experiences. Not exhausting striving.

*Unforced rhythms.*

But here's the challenge: If you've been living in frenzy for years—and most of us have—rhythm will feel foreign at first. Maybe even wrong. The guilt will whisper, "Shouldn't I be doing more?" The fear will ask, "What if I fall behind?" The comparison will accuse, "Everyone else seems busier. Am I being lazy?"

So before you continue, pause. Consider:

*Can you say, even tentatively: "God, I'm tired of running. I'm willing to learn a different pace. I'm willing to believe that You delight in me*

*when I'm resting as much as when I'm working. Teach me Your unforced rhythms."*

That's enough. That willingness opens the door.

Because what comes next isn't about doing more—it's about living from a different place. Not striving toward fullness, but living from fullness. Not working for rest, but working from rest.

Welcome to the unforced rhythms of grace.

Let's be honest about what rhythm actually feels like. Because if you've been living in frenzy for years—and most of us have—rhythm will feel foreign at first. Maybe even wrong.

Rhythm feels like:

- **Breath:** Deep, full, unforced. You're not gasping anymore. You're breathing.
- **Pace:** You're walking, not sprinting. And you're not collapsing from exhaustion at the end of the day.
- **Space:** There's margin in your calendar. Silence in your schedule. Room to breathe.
- **Presence:** You're actually here. Not mentally rehearsing the next thing or replaying the last thing. Here.
- **Simplicity:** You've stopped juggling seventeen balls and picked up the three that actually matter.

But here's what rhythm might also feel like, at least at first:

- **Guilt:** "Shouldn't I be doing more?"
- **Fear:** "What if I fall behind?"
- **Comparison:** "Everyone else seems busier. Am I being lazy?"

- **Disorientation:** "I don't know how to just be. I only know how to do."

This is normal. Because rhythm challenges everything our culture teaches us about productivity, worth, and significance.

Our culture says: More is better. Busy is virtuous. Rest is weakness. Your value is measured by your output.

Grace says: Enough is enough. Sustainable is sustainable. Rest is sacred. Your value was settled at the cross.

*"The great danger facing all of us is not that we shall make an absolute failure of life, nor that we shall fall into outright viciousness, nor that we shall be terribly unhappy... The danger is that we may fail to perceive life, and fall into a working routine and a sleeping routine." — Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines*

Rhythm requires unlearning. It requires deprogramming years of messages that tied your worth to your productivity. It requires believing something scandalous: God delights in you when you're resting as much as when you're working.

Maybe more.

## Key Themes

### 1. From Hype to Home: The Set Point Theory

There's a concept in psychology called the "set point" theory of happiness. It suggests that each of us has a baseline level of well-being—a natural temperament that's relatively stable over time. Good things happen, bad things happen, but we tend to return to our set point.

Here's why this matters for understanding grace: Grace doesn't promise constant emotional highs. It doesn't promise that every day will feel like a mountaintop experience.

Grace offers something better: a stable foundation beneath the fluctuations.

Not hype, but home.

Not peak experiences, but sustainable presence.

Not manufactured intensity, but authentic rhythm.

Think about it: You can have a hard day and still be grounded in grace. You can feel sad and still be held by God. You can experience disappointment, frustration, even anger—and still be living in the unforced rhythms of grace.

Because grace isn't about eliminating life's natural ups and downs. It's about providing the steady baseline—the set point—from which you experience them.

I spent years chasing the high. The worship experience that gave me goosebumps. The prayer time where I felt God's presence palpably. The Bible study where everything clicked and I was convinced I'd finally "got it."

And then I'd crash. The goosebumps would fade. The presence would feel distant. The clarity would blur. And I'd think, "I'm losing it. I'm backsliding. I need to try harder."

So I'd manufacture the intensity. Force the experience. Push for the feeling.

Until I discovered: Grace isn't the high. Grace is the home. The stable foundation. The set point.

Some days are up. Some days are down. But underneath it all, there's grace. Steady. Reliable. New every morning.

Henri Nouwen captures this beautifully:

*"The greatest gift of the spiritual life is to be able to rest in God's presence." — Henri Nouwen, The Return of the Prodigal Son*

Not to perform in God's presence. Not to achieve in God's presence. To rest. This is the home we're invited into—a place of abiding rest beneath all the fluctuations.

## **2. Daily Bread, Daily Grace: The Manna Experience**

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God provided manna—bread from heaven—every single morning. But there were rules: gather only what you need for today. Don't try to hoard it for tomorrow. Trust that tomorrow will have its own provision.

When Israel first saw it, they said "Man hu?"—"What is it?" The question mark. They didn't recognize God's provision because it didn't look like what they expected.

But day after day, as they gathered it and ate it and were sustained by it, the question mark changed to an exclamation mark. "This is God's provision! This is grace made tangible!"

Living in unforced rhythms means participating in a manna experience:

- You don't have to figure out next month's provision today
- You just gather today's manna
- You trust tomorrow will have its own
- You don't hoard grace; you receive it fresh each morning

This is what Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Not weekly bread. Not monthly bread. Daily bread.

Because grace is meant to be received in rhythm—morning by morning, day by day.

I'm a planner. I want to have the next three months figured out. I want backup plans for my backup plans. I want to secure tomorrow's grace today, just in case God doesn't show up tomorrow.

But that's not how manna works. That's not how grace works.

When Israel tried to hoard manna, it rotted. It bred worms. It stank.

When I try to hoard grace—when I try to manufacture tomorrow's provision today—it does the same thing. It becomes dead religion instead of living relationship. Performance instead of presence. Anxiety instead of trust.

The manna experience teaches me: Today's grace is sufficient for today. And tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow.

This is freedom. The freedom to be fully present to today instead of anxiously trying to control tomorrow.

### **3. From Survival to Thriving: Asking Different Questions**

There's a fundamental difference between surviving and thriving. Survival is crisis management. Thriving is intentional cultivation.

In the swamp, survival was the only option. How do I make it through today? How do I keep breathing? How do I not completely fall apart?

At the water's edge, you moved from crisis to cleansing. Still focused on immediate needs—getting clean, finding healing, experiencing rescue.

But in the unforced rhythms of grace, you're learning to thrive. You're not just reacting to crises anymore. You're building a sustainable life. You're asking different questions:

- What do I want to see MORE of in my life?

- What do I want to see LESS of?
- What do I want NOT AT ALL anymore?

From these questions come projects, goals, plans. Not frantic New Year's resolutions that set you up for failure. But grace-paced renewal that leads to transformation.

MORE: Connection with God. Authentic community. Creative expression. Rest. Joy. Presence.

LESS: Hurry. Performance. People-pleasing. Comparison. Distraction.

NOT AT ALL: Shame. Fear-based motivation. Relationships that drain rather than energize. Commitments that don't align with my calling.

These aren't rules. They're rhythms. Patterns you choose because they bring life.

And here's the beautiful thing: When you live from these rhythms long enough, they stop feeling like discipline and start feeling like desire. You don't have to force yourself to rest—you crave it. You don't have to remind yourself to be present—it becomes natural.

This is the shift from duty to delight. From obligation to overflow. From working toward rest to working from rest.

### **Becoming Real Takes Time**

But let's be honest: this transformation doesn't happen overnight. The shift from frenzy to rhythm, from performance to presence, from duty to delight—it's gradual. It requires patience with yourself.

Margery Williams captures this beautifully in *The Velveteen Rabbit*:

*"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse.  
"You become. It takes a long time. That's why it  
doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or*

*have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."*  
— Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*

Becoming Real—learning to live in unforced rhythms—means being loved into authenticity over time. It means:

- Your rough edges get worn smooth not through self-improvement programs, but through the daily friction of grace
- You get "loose in the joints"—less rigid, more flexible, more able to bend without breaking
- You become "shabby" by the world's standards—less polished, less impressive, less concerned with appearances
- But you're Real. Authentic. No longer performing. No longer pretending. Just present.

This is what the unforced rhythms are creating in you. Not overnight transformation. Not instant perfection. But steady, gentle, persistent becoming.

You're being loved into who you actually are. And that takes time. Be patient with yourself.

#### **4. Jesus' Rhythm: The Model for Sustainability**

If you want to understand unforced rhythms, watch Jesus. He's the master of sustainable spiritual life. He never burned out. Never collapsed under the weight of ministry. Never lost His connection to the Father.

How?



Rhythm.

Mark 1:35 captures it perfectly:

*"Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray." — Mark 1:35 (NLT)*

This wasn't a one-time event. It was His pattern. His rhythm. Withdrawal and engagement. Solitude and community. Prayer and action. Rest and work.

Jesus would pour Himself out in ministry—teaching, healing, casting out demons, engaging with crowds. Then He would withdraw. To a solitary place. To pray. To reconnect with the Father. To be refilled.

He didn't wait until He was empty. He maintained the rhythm.

Engagement. Withdrawal. Engagement. Withdrawal.

Because He lived in this rhythm, He had something to give. Not out of duty. Not out of obligation. Out of overflow.

This is the model. This is what sustainable looks like.

And notice: Jesus faced immense pressure to skip the rhythm. People were sick. Crowds were waiting. Disciples were asking questions. There was always more to do.

But He protected the rhythm. He withdrew even when others wanted more from Him. He rested even when the need was urgent.

Why? Because He knew: If I don't maintain the rhythm, I'll have nothing to give. And giving from empty isn't sustainable.

I've spent most of my Christian life trying to give from empty. Leading worship when I was spiritually depleted. Teaching when I hadn't spent time with God myself. Serving when I desperately needed rest.

And I wondered why I burned out. Why ministry felt like a burden. Why I was always exhausted.

Jesus shows a different way. Maintain the rhythm. Withdrawal and engagement. Empty and refill. Rest and work. Henri Nouwen, who wrote extensively about this pattern, observed:

*"Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and him alone." — Henri Nouwen, Making All Things New*

Not after you've earned it. Not when the work is done. As part of the work.

## The Core Scripture Truth

**Matthew 11:28-30** - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

This is Jesus' manifesto for sustainable spiritual life. Let's unpack it slowly:

### **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened"**

Jesus' invitation is not to the strong, the capable, the ones who have it all together. It's to the exhausted. The burned out. The ones carrying loads they were never meant to carry.

If you're tired—not just physically tired, but soul-tired—you're exactly who Jesus is calling.

### **"I will give you rest"**

Not "I will give you more work." Not "I will give you higher standards." Rest. Real rest. Soul rest. The kind of rest that comes not from escaping responsibility but from living in rhythm with grace.

**"Take my yoke upon you"**

A yoke is a working tool. Jesus isn't calling you to quit everything and retreat from life. He's calling you to work—but to work in partnership with Him. To let Him set the pace. To let Him carry the weight. To work in His strength, not your own.

**"Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"**

The teacher matters. Jesus doesn't drive you with shame. Doesn't demand perfection. Doesn't measure your worth by your productivity.

He is gentle. Humble. Patient. And as you learn from Him—as you watch His rhythms, adopt His patterns, live in His pace—you discover a different way of being.

**"You will find rest for your souls"**

Not just physical rest. Soul rest. The deep, abiding peace that comes from living in alignment with how you were made. From walking in the unforced rhythms of grace.

**"My yoke is easy and my burden is light"**

Easy doesn't mean effortless. It means well-fitting. Like a yoke custom-made for the ox wearing it. Jesus' way of life fits you. It's designed for human beings. It's sustainable.

Light doesn't mean weightless. It means right-sized. Not crushing. Not overwhelming. Bearable. In fact, more than bearable—life-giving.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**The shift from frenzy to rhythm doesn't happen all at once. It happens one choice at a time.**

For years, I lived in frenzy. Crisis mode. Always reacting. Always behind. Always exhausted. I thought that's what faithfulness looked like—burning out for Jesus.

But frenzy isn't faithfulness. It's fear. Fear that if I slow down, I'll fall behind. Fear that if I rest, I'll be lazy. Fear that if I'm not producing, I'm not valuable.

The wayfarer moment came when I realized: this isn't sustainable. I can't keep living like this. And God doesn't want me to.

I started protecting time for rest, not as an afterthought when all the work was done, but as a priority woven into my rhythm.

This didn't happen overnight. It's still happening. I still slip into frenzy sometimes. I still over-commit. I still try to hoard tomorrow's grace instead of receiving today's.

## **Song Integration**

I was drowning in activity when I discovered that Jesus' yoke is actually easy. For years, I'd been living at breakneck speed—calendar packed, to-do list never-ending, mind constantly racing. I wore busyness like a badge of honor, convinced that exhaustion proved devotion. But I was running on fumes, burned out. Then I crashed. Not dramatically—just stopped.

In that crashed season, my counselor asked me a question I couldn't answer: "When was the last time you noticed God's presence without trying to do anything with it?" I sat there, silent. Because every spiritual practice had become performance. Every quiet time had an agenda. I'd turned even rest into productivity. He gave me one assignment: "Go for a walk. Don't pray. Don't problem-solve. Don't plan. Just notice." And then: "Read Matthew 11:28-30. Not to study it.

Just to hear it."

## Lyrics: Mindful Bliss of Grace

### [Verse 1]

Ebb and flow, the waves embrace my feet,  
Your whispers call where sea and skylines meet.  
The setting sun declares the close of day,  
Your steadfast love shines bright along the way.

### [Chorus]

Great is Your faithfulness, steady and true,  
Mercies each morning are always brand new.  
Through every season, Your love still persists,  
You lead me, Lord, into mindful bliss.

### [Outro]

Through trials and storms, through winds that roar,  
Your steadfast grace remains forevermore.  
Each tear I cry, each prayer I raise,  
Lifts me higher to endless praise.

## Key Takeaways

- **Grace offers rhythm, not frenzy.** You don't have to maintain crisis-level intensity to stay faithful. Jesus' yoke is easy and light because it fits how you're designed to live.
- **Receive daily bread, don't hoard tomorrow's grace.** Like manna in the wilderness, grace is meant to be gathered fresh each morning. Trust today's provision and let tomorrow take care of itself.

- **Work from rest, not toward it.** Sustainable faithfulness means maintaining rhythm—withdrawal and engagement, solitude and community, Sabbath and work—just as Jesus modeled.
- **Your worth isn't measured by productivity.** Resting is an act of faith, declaring that God values you as His beloved child whether you're producing or simply being present.

## Reflections for the Road

### 1. Where are you living in frenzy instead of rhythm?

Look at your calendar. Your commitments. Your daily patterns. Where are you reacting instead of choosing?

Name one specific area where you're running on adrenaline rather than grace. What would it look like to bring rhythm to that area?

### 2. What does "daily bread" look like for you?

What are the daily practices that actually sustain you—not the ones you think you should do, but the ones that genuinely nourish you?

Are you gathering today's manna and trusting tomorrow's will come? Or are you hoarding, striving, trying to stockpile enough to feel safe?

### 3. Read Matthew 11:28-30 slowly.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What does Jesus' invitation to "easy and light" mean for you today? Where are you carrying a yoke that's too heavy—burdens He never asked you to bear?

## **1. Listen to your life**

What brings you life?. What drains you?.

## **2. Identify life-giving rhythms**

Based on what you've noticed, what rhythms sustain you?. Morning prayer?.

## **3. Build them into your life as rhythm, not rules**

The difference: rules say "you have to." Rhythms say "this is life-giving." Don't try to implement everything at once. Pick one or two rhythms this month.

## **4. Hold them loosely**

Life changes.. Seasons change..

## **5. Review and adjust**

Every few months, review your rhythms.. What's working?.

## **Closing Image**

You're not at the water's edge anymore. You've waded in deeper. And you've discovered something surprising: the water has a current.

Not a violent current that sweeps you away. A gentle current. A flow. And when you stop fighting it—when you stop trying to control every movement—you realize the current is carrying you.

This is what the unforced rhythms feel like. You're not striving anymore. Not forcing. Not manufacturing spiritual experiences or trying to prove your worth through exhausting effort.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 10)

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

### Chapter 10: Deep Roots, Strong Growth

*"Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD... They will be like a tree planted by the water... Its leaves are always green; it has no worries... and never fails to bear fruit." — Jeremiah 17:7-8*

I Will Trust You Lord

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylertthomas.com/DxCmnx>



*Scan to listen: I Will Trust You Lord*

### An Invitation to Go Deeper

You've discovered rhythm. You've learned the unforced way of living. You're not in crisis mode anymore, not frantically trying to maintain impossible intensity.

But now I need to ask you something uncomfortable:



**When stress comes, when pressure mounts, when circumstances get hard—do you still revert to old patterns?**

Be honest. Do you still react defensively when criticized? Still withdraw when hurt? Still carry bitterness longer than you should? Still struggle with pride, with comparison, with the need to prove yourself?

Here's what I've discovered: **Rhythms are good. But rhythms without roots become rote. Practices without depth become performance.**

## **Key Themes**

### **1. The Work of Putting to Death**

Before roots can go deep into what belongs, they have to let go of what doesn't. This is the paradox at the heart of spiritual growth: deep roots require dying.

There are things that have to be put to death:

**Pride** - The need to be right. The compulsion to prove ourselves. The addiction to being seen, recognized, validated by others.

Pride keeps roots shallow because it keeps us focused on ourselves rather than God. We're constantly comparing, competing, defending, performing. All that energy goes into image management rather than transformation.

I've spent years defending myself. Explaining myself. Making sure people understood my motives. And all that defending kept me shallow. Because I was more concerned with how I looked than with who I was becoming.

Humility is the antidote. Not self-hatred. But what Paul calls "considering others more significant than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). The freedom to be wrong and still be loved. To lose the argument

and not lose yourself.

**Reactivity** - Responding from wounds instead of from identity. When someone criticizes you, do you react defensively? When life doesn't go your way, do you lash out? When you feel threatened, do you attack?

Reactivity is living from your False Self—the wounded, defended, self-protective version of you.

Deep roots grow when you learn to respond from your True Self—the beloved, secure, grounded-in-God version of you.

There's a space between what happens to us and how we respond. In that space lies our power to choose. Viktor Frankl called this the essence of human freedom—the ability to choose our response even in the most difficult circumstances.

I've been working on this for years, and I still fail regularly. Someone questions my decision, and I immediately get defensive. Someone misunderstands my motives, and I rush to explain. Someone hurts me, and I want to hurt back.

But I'm learning. Learning to pause. To feel the reaction without acting on it. To ask: "Is this coming from my woundedness or from my belovedness?"

That pause—that space between stimulus and response—is where deep roots grow.

**Isolation** - The temptation to withdraw when things get hard. To hide your struggles. To pretend you're fine when you're not.

Isolation is the enemy of deep roots. Trees don't grow in isolation—they grow in groves, forests, communities where their roots intertwine with other roots, creating stability and sharing nutrients.

I'm an introvert. When I'm hurting, my instinct is to withdraw. To pull back. To process alone. And sometimes that's healthy. But isolation as a lifestyle? That's deadly.

Deep roots require staying connected even when you want to withdraw. Showing up to community even when you don't feel like it. Being honest about your struggles even when it's scary.

**Bitterness** - The nursing of perceived injustices. The rehearsal of how you've been wronged. The keeping of records. The refusal to forgive.

Bitterness is like poison in the soil. It doesn't hurt the person you're bitter toward—it hurts you. It keeps your roots shallow and twisted, unable to reach the streams of living water because they're too busy clinging to old wounds.

I've carried bitterness. Rehearsed conversations with people who hurt me. Kept score. Built cases. And all that bitterness did was keep me stuck.

Forgiveness is the answer. Not because what happened was okay. But because holding onto it gives it power over you.

You release it so your roots can grow deep into grace rather than staying tangled in grievance.

*"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." — Lewis B. Smedes, Forgive and Forget*

Putting things to death is only half the work of sending roots deep. The other half is actively cultivating what belongs—replacing what dies with what brings life.

## 2. The Work of Cultivating What Belongs

Putting to death is only half the work. The other half is cultivating what belongs—the virtues, practices, and postures that create conditions for deep roots.

**Humility** - Acknowledging your need for grace. Admitting you don't have it all together. Embracing your limits rather than pretending they don't exist.

Humility positions you to receive. Pride keeps you on the surface, performing. Humility sends roots deep, receiving.

**Responsiveness** - Acting from your True Self, not your wounded self. Learning to pause between stimulus and response.

This requires self-awareness—knowing your triggers, understanding your patterns, recognizing when you're operating from wounds versus operating from belovedness.

And it requires spiritual practices—silence and solitude to hear God's voice, prayer to seek His guidance, Scripture to renew your mind, community to hold you accountable.

**Connection** - Staying engaged even when vulnerable. Showing up even when it's hard. Choosing relationship over isolation.

I've learned this the hard way: I need people. Not perfect people. Not people who never disappoint me. But people who show up. Who pray for me. Who tell me the truth in love.

Connection is where roots deepen.

**Forgiveness** - Releasing what you can't control. Letting go of the need for justice, vindication, or revenge.

Forgiveness isn't a one-time decision. It's a daily practice. Sometimes an hourly practice. You choose to release the offense again and again until one day you realize it no longer has power over you.

These practices of putting to death and cultivating life create the conditions for deep roots. And Psalm 1 paints the picture of what a deeply rooted life looks like.

### **3. The Tree by Streams of Water**

Psalm 1 paints a picture of flourishing that captures everything deep roots make possible:

*"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked... but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers." — Psalm 1:1-3*

Notice the progression:

**Planted, not drifting.** Intentional, rooted, stable. You've been planted by streams—the water's edge of grace. Now roots are growing deep.

**Streams of water.** The tree doesn't generate its own water. It's positioned by an abundant source. You don't generate your own grace. You're rooted in God's inexhaustible provision.

**Fruit in season.** Not all the time. Not constantly. In season. This is realistic spirituality. There are seasons of growth, seasons of fruit, seasons of dormancy, seasons of pruning. Deep roots don't guarantee constant productivity. They guarantee sustainable fruitfulness over time.

**Leaf does not wither.** Even in drought—hard seasons when surface moisture evaporates, when emotions are dry, when external supports fail—the deeply rooted tree endures. Why? Because deep roots access water others can't reach.

**Whatever they do prospers.** Not prosperity gospel. This is organic flourishing. A well-rooted tree naturally prospers because it's connected to its source.

Stay rooted. The fruit will come. Not forced. Not manufactured. Organic. In season.

This picture of the tree by streams of water is beautiful. But here's what we need to understand: roots like these don't grow overnight. They require something most of us struggle with: time.

## 4. Roots Take Time

Here's what nobody tells you about deep roots: they take time. Years. Sometimes decades.

We live in an instant culture. We want microwavable transformation. Download the app, follow the seven steps, and boom—you're changed.

But roots don't work that way.

And for most of that time, you can't see the growth. Above ground, the tree might look unchanged. But below ground, everything is happening.

This is the hidden work of transformation. The work that happens when no one's watching. The work that doesn't make for dramatic testimonies because it's slow, steady, mostly invisible.

I'm fifteen years into this journey. And I'm still discovering shallow roots. Still finding places where I react instead of respond. Still uncovering bitterness I thought I'd released. Still learning to stay connected when I want to withdraw.

But I'm also seeing growth I couldn't see five years ago. Situations that would have wrecked me ten years ago now just... don't. Not because I'm stronger. Because the roots have gone deeper. I'm accessing streams I couldn't reach before.

This is the long obedience in the same direction. This is the slow work of becoming.

And it's worth it. Because when the drought comes—and it will come—deep roots mean the difference between withering and thriving.

*"A Christian is never in a state of completion but always in the process of becoming." — Martin Luther, Lectures on Romans*

## **The Core Scripture Truth**

**John 15:5-8** - "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

This is Jesus's teaching on remaining—on abiding. And it's the theological foundation for everything this chapter teaches about deep roots.

**"I am the vine; you are the branches."**

The relationship is organic, not mechanical. Not master and servant. Vine and branches. Living connection. Shared life. The sap that flows through the vine flows through the branches.

You're not disconnected from Jesus, trying to imitate Him from a distance. You're connected to Jesus, sharing His life.

**"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."**

The condition is remaining. Not striving. Not performing. Not white-knuckling your way to holiness. Remaining. Abiding. Staying connected.

And the promise is fruit. Not because you're trying to produce it. But because life is flowing from the vine into the branches. The fruit is inevitable when the connection is sustained.

**"Apart from me you can do nothing."**

This is both humbling and liberating. Humbling because it reminds you: you're not the source. You can't generate spiritual life through your own effort.

Liberating because it takes the pressure off. You don't have to produce. You just have to remain.

**"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit."**

The goal isn't your glory. It's the Father's. When you bear fruit—when love, joy, peace, patience, kindness grow in you—people see it and give glory to God.

Not because you're amazing. Because God's grace is transforming you.

This is the theological anchor: remain in Jesus. Let His words remain in you. And fruit will come—not forced, but organic. Not manufactured, but received. Not through your effort, but through your abiding.

Deep roots make abiding possible. And abiding makes fruit inevitable.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**Learning to trust the hidden work.**

For years, I equated spiritual growth with visible progress. I wanted to see results. Measure outcomes. Track my advancement.

If I couldn't see it, I questioned whether anything was actually happening.

The most important growth happens underground. Unseen. Unmeasured. Unremarkable to anyone watching.

But God was growing roots.

Through sustained practices. Through showing up even when I didn't feel like it. Through choosing connection over isolation. Through releasing bitterness and cultivating forgiveness.

Because here's what I've learned: surface-level change happens fast but doesn't last. Deep transformation happens slowly but endures.



I still have hard days. Days when I'm reactive instead of responsive. Days when I choose isolation over connection. Days when bitterness resurfaces and I have to forgive again.

## Psalm 1 (NLT)

*Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly. For the LORD watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. — Psalm 1 (NLT)*

## Song Integration

The counselor looked at me and said, "You're doing all the right things, but your roots haven't gone deep enough yet."

I didn't want to hear that. I'd been practicing the rhythms for months. Showing up to prayer even when I didn't feel like it. Reading Scripture even when it felt dry. Staying connected to community even when I wanted to withdraw.

But she was right. I was doing the practices without allowing them to transform me deeply. I was maintaining spiritual disciplines as performance rather than letting them sink roots that could weather the storms. The rhythms were external, not yet internal. The transformation was happening at the surface level, but the deep

roots—the kind that anchor you when everything else shakes—those take time, consistency, and patient trust in the hidden work of God.

"I Will Trust You Lord" emerged from that season of learning to trust the invisible growth happening beneath the surface. The song captures the tension between what we can see (leaves that stay green, fruit that appears) and what we can't see (roots going deeper, drawing from living water). Like Jeremiah 17:8, this is about trusting the process when you can't see the progress—believing that God is doing deep work even when all you see is the daily showing up, the ordinary faithfulness, the unglamorous consistency that builds resilience over time.

## **Lyrics: I Will Trust You Lord**

### **[Verse 1]**

I will trust You, Lord, my shelter, my song  
Planted by Your stream, where my roots grow strong  
When the heat is near, still my leaves stay bright  
In the darkest storm, You will be my light

### **[Chorus]**

Like a tree beside the river, I will stand so tall  
Through the fire, through the season, You're my all in all  
My leaves stay green, my soul stays strong  
Your love sustains me all life long  
I will bear Your fruit, Lord, make me new  
I am deeply rooted in You

### **[Outro]**

No fear in the drought (No fear, no fear!)  
No doubt in the storm (No doubt, no doubt!)

Your love is my anchor (My heart is Yours!)

I'll trust You, Lord (Forevermore!)

## Key Takeaways

- **Roots determine resilience.** Surface growth impresses, but deep roots sustain. When drought comes, shallow plants wither while deeply rooted trees stay green—not through effort, but through connection to living water.
- **Put pride, reactivity, isolation, and bitterness to death.** These keep roots shallow. Replace them with humility, responsiveness, connection, and forgiveness to create conditions for deep growth.
- **Remain in the vine; fruit follows naturally.** You don't manufacture spiritual fruit through striving. You stay connected to Jesus through sustained practices, and transformation flows from that abiding relationship.
- **Trust the hidden work.** The most important growth happens underground, unseen and unmeasured. Keep showing up, keep practicing, keep remaining—the roots are going deeper than you realize.

## Reflections for the Road

### Questions for the Journey:

- What needs to die so roots can go deep? Where is pride keeping you shallow? Where is reactivity preventing growth? Where is isolation cutting you off? Where is bitterness poisoning the soil?
- What practices position you by the stream? Prayer? Scripture? Sabbath? Solitude? Worship? Community? Are you practicing them consistently?

- Where are you trying to manufacture fruit instead of remaining in the vine? Are you striving to be more loving? Trying harder to be joyful? White-knuckling your way to peace?
- What does "fruit in season" mean for you right now? Not every season is fruitful. Some are for growth. Some for pruning. Some for rest. What season are you in?

### **1. Daily: Drink from the stream**

Choose one practice that connects you to God daily.. Morning prayer and Scripture..

### **2. Weekly: Sabbath rest**

Set aside one day (or a few hours) each week for Sabbath.. Not as legalism..

### **3. Monthly: Solitude and silence**

Once a month, create extended space for solitude.. A few hours..

### **4. Seasonally: Examine your roots**

Every few months, review: Are my roots going deeper?. Or am I staying shallow?.

### **5. Community: Grow in groves**

Trees don't grow in isolation.. Their roots intertwine with other roots..

## **Closing Image**

You're standing at the base of an ancient tree. Massive. Towering. Its canopy spreads wide, providing shade for acres.

How long has this tree been here? A hundred years? Two hundred? More?

You walk closer and place your hand on the trunk. Solid. Rough. Weathered by countless storms. Scarred by lightning strikes. Marked by seasons of growth and seasons of pruning.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 11)

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

### Chapter 11: Redemption's Story

*"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done." —  
Genesis 50:20*

Redemption Story

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylerthomas.com/MN36D4>



*Scan to listen: Redemption Story*

### An Invitation to See

You've been through ten chapters now. The swamp. The water's edge. The rhythms. The roots. You've experienced rescue, cleansing, healing, and transformation.

But now I need to ask you something that might change how you see everything:

## What if your story isn't separate from THE story?

What if the pain you've experienced has context? What if the waiting has meaning? What if the struggle isn't random?

Here's what I've discovered: **Your story—the swamp and the rescue, the breaking and the healing, the death and the rising—follows the same pattern as every redemption story ever told.**

Creation. Fall. Redemption. Restoration.

This isn't coincidence. It's the arc of reality itself. The shape of how grace works. The pattern woven into the fabric of existence.

This chapter is about seeing your story within God's story. And when you do, everything stops being random.

The years in the swamp aren't just years you lost. They're the wilderness—like Israel in the desert, like Elijah in the cave, like David on the run. Necessary preparation for what comes next.

The water's edge isn't just a nice metaphor. It's baptism. It's Red Sea crossing. It's Jordan River moment. The place where the old dies and the new begins.

The unforced rhythms aren't just helpful life hacks. They're manna in the wilderness. They're Sabbath rest. They're the sustainable pace of people learning to walk with God.

The deep roots aren't just personal growth. They're becoming the tree of Psalm 1, the vine of John 15, the planting of the Lord for His glory.

When you see your story within God's story, you start to live differently. With purpose. With hope. With perseverance. With mission.

So before you continue, pause. Consider:

*Can you say, even tentatively: "God, my story is part of Your story. The broken chapters, the painful seasons, the years I thought were*

*wasted—they're all woven into the redemption arc You're writing. Help me see my life through that lens."*

That shift in perspective changes everything.

Because what comes next isn't just about understanding theology. It's about seeing your life—all of it—as part of the greatest story ever told.

## Key Themes

### 1. The Gospel as THE Story

Christianity isn't one religious option among many. It's THE story—the framework within which human history unfolds. The lens through which we understand who we are, why we're here, what went wrong, and how it's being made right.

The redemption story has a clear arc:

**Creation** - God makes everything good. Humanity is created in His image, designed for relationship with Him, given purpose and dignity and calling. Before any of us sinned, before any of us fell, we had worth because we were created by God, for God, to reflect God.

**Fall** - Sin enters through human rebellion. The image is marred. Relationship is broken. Creation is cursed. Death enters the world. Humanity is exiled from Eden. This is the swamp—not just your personal swamp, but the cosmic swamp we're all born into.

**Redemption** - God doesn't abandon His creation. He promises a Savior. He calls a people. He gives the Law to reveal sin and point to grace. He sends prophets to declare His faithfulness. And then—in the fullness of time—He sends His Son. Jesus, the eternal Word, becomes flesh. Lives the perfect life we couldn't live. Dies the death we deserved. Rises victorious over sin and death. Accomplishes redemption.



**Restoration** - The story isn't finished. Jesus ascended but promised to return. He's building His Church. He's reconciling all things to Himself. And one day—the day we're waiting for—He will return to judge the living and the dead, to make all things new, to restore creation to what it was always meant to be.

This is THE story. And you're in it. As Timothy Keller puts it:

*"The Christian story is that God descended into our mess, took the full brunt of our sin and death, and triumphed over it in Jesus." — Timothy Keller, The Reason for God*

Not a story of humanity climbing up to God, but God descending to us. Not self-help, but divine rescue. Not moral improvement, but death and resurrection.

## 2. Your Story Within God's Story

Your personal narrative isn't separate from God's narrative. It's woven into it. Your redemption story is a particular expression of THE redemption story.

When you were in the swamp, you weren't just struggling with personal sin. You were experiencing the effects of the fall—the brokenness that entered creation when humanity rebelled against God.

When you cried out for help, you weren't just praying for relief. You were participating in the pattern of human cry and divine response that runs throughout Scripture.

When you encountered grace at the water's edge, you weren't just having a personal religious experience. You were meeting the same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, who led Israel through the Red Sea, who sent His Son to seek and save the lost.

When you died to self and rose in new life, you weren't just turning over a new leaf. You were participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus. United with Him in His death. Raised with Him in His

resurrection. A new creation.

Your story matters because it's part of God's story. The specifics are yours—your swamp is different from mine, your water's edge encounter is unique, your rhythms and roots look different than anyone else's. But the pattern is universal. The arc is the same.

Michael Card reminds us:

*"We are not the hero of our own story. We live, instead, in God's story." — Michael Card, A Sacred Sorrow*

This shift in perspective changes everything. I'm not the protagonist trying to write my own happy ending. I'm a character in a much larger narrative—one written by an Author who knows how to redeem every broken chapter.

### **3. Nothing Wasted**

One of the most powerful promises in the redemption story is this: nothing is wasted.

Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Notice: Paul doesn't say all things are good. They're not. Sin is evil. Suffering is real. Brokenness hurts.

But he does say God works in all things for good. He's taking even the broken pieces—especially the broken pieces—and weaving them into a story of redemption.

Joseph's story is the perfect illustration. Betrayed by his brothers. Sold into slavery. Falsely accused. Imprisoned. Forgotten.

But God was at work the whole time. And when Joseph finally sees the bigger story, he can say to his brothers: "You intended to harm me,

but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

You intended harm. God intended good.

Not that God caused the harm. But that He redeemed it. He took what was meant for destruction and turned it into salvation.

This is the promise for you: the years you spent in the swamp aren't wasted. God is redeeming them. The pain you experienced isn't meaningless. God is using it. The struggles that nearly broke you are being transformed into testimonies that will strengthen others.

Christine Caine writes:

*"Nothing is wasted in the economy of God. Not a tear, not a heartbreak, not a disappointment." — Christine Caine, Undaunted*

This isn't wishful thinking—it's the pattern we see throughout Scripture. Every loss, every wound, every seemingly meaningless season becomes raw material for God's redemptive work.

#### **4. Living as Part of the Larger Story**

When you grasp that your story is part of God's story, it changes how you live.

**You live with purpose.** Your life isn't random. You're part of God's redemption project. Every choice matters. Every day has meaning. You're being formed for eternity.

**You live with hope.** No matter how hard today is, you know the ending. The story doesn't end with suffering. It ends with restoration. Jesus returns. All things are made new. You live in light of that promised future.

**You live with perseverance.** The struggles you face aren't meaningless. They're part of the redemption arc. God is using them to

shape you, refine you, prepare you for the role you'll play in His kingdom.

**You live with mission.** You're not just receiving redemption. You're participating in it. God redeems you so you can be part of His redemptive work in the world. You bring light into dark places. Hope into despair. Grace into brokenness.

**You live with gratitude.** When you see the whole arc—creation, fall, redemption, restoration, consummation—you're overwhelmed by grace. You didn't earn this. You didn't deserve it. But God, in His great love, wrote you into His story. Philip Yancey captures the radical nature of grace:

*"Grace, like water, flows to the lowest part. Grace is given to the ones who admit they are thirsty, the ones who admit they cannot save themselves." — Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?*

Grace doesn't wait for us to climb up to it. It flows down to where we actually are—in the low places, the broken places, the places where we've finally stopped pretending we can save ourselves.

## The Core Scripture Truth

**Romans 8:28-30** - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

This is the redemption arc applied to individual lives. Let's unpack it:

**"In all things God works for the good"**

Not some things. All things. Not just the good experiences. All experiences. God is at work in the swamp and at the water's edge, in

the dying and in the rising, in the valleys and on the mountains.

This doesn't mean all things are good. They're not. Sin is evil. Suffering is real. Brokenness hurts.

But it does mean God is working in all things. Taking even the broken pieces and weaving them into a story of redemption.

### **"For the good of those who love him"**

The promise is conditional. It's for those who love God—who are in relationship with Him, who trust Him, who have responded to His call.

If you've entered the redemption story—if you've responded to God's call, trusted in Jesus, been brought into the family—then this promise is yours.

God is working all things for your good. Not for your comfort. Not for your ease. But for your ultimate good—conformity to Christ, participation in His kingdom, eternal glory with Him.

### **"Called... justified... glorified"**

Paul traces the redemption arc in three movements:

**Called** - God pursued you. Spoke to you. Drew you to Himself. Your "yes" wasn't the beginning—God's call was.

**Justified** - You were declared righteous. Not because you earned it. But because Jesus' righteousness was credited to you. You stand before God forgiven, accepted, beloved—based on Christ's finished work.

**Glorified** - Past tense. Even though it's future. Why? Because in God's eternal perspective, it's already done. The story is written. The ending is secure.

You will be glorified—fully redeemed, completely restored, eternally with Christ.

This is the theological anchor: your redemption is part of God's eternal purpose. He foreknew you. Predestined you. Called you. Justified you. And He will glorify you.

The story isn't in doubt. The ending is secure.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**Seeing my story in THE story.**

For years, I thought my story was just mine. My struggles. My failures. My small attempts to get it right.

I'd read the Bible as ancient history—good for principles, maybe, but not personally connected to my everyday life.

But then I started to see it.

I wasn't just crying out for help. I was participating in the pattern of cry and divine response that echoes through the Psalms.

And when I saw that—really saw it—everything changed.

The failures I'd carried with shame weren't the end of my story. They were chapters in a larger redemption narrative. Like Peter's denial. Like Paul's persecution. Like Joseph's pit.

I'm not the author. I'm a character. But I'm a beloved character in a story written by a good Author who knows how to turn crucifixions into resurrections.

And I know that in all things—ALL things—God is working for good. Nothing is wasted. Every pain has purpose. Every struggle is part of the redemption arc.

## **Song Integration**

For years, my life felt like disconnected pieces. Random events. Unrelated struggles. Pain here, joy there, failure in one season, growth in another—but no coherent thread tying it all together.

I looked at my story and saw chaos. Mistakes I couldn't undo. Seasons that felt wasted. Suffering that seemed meaningless.

Then I encountered Romans 8:28-30 with fresh eyes: "In all things God works for the good of those who love him... those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." This isn't random. This isn't chaos. This is the redemption arc—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration—written not just in the grand biblical narrative but in every individual life that turns toward God.

"Redemption Story" traces this arc from Genesis to Jesus to now. The song begins with creation—"Before the stars adorned the night, the Word was spoken, creation came"—grounding our personal stories in the larger Story of God's creative intent. We're not accidents. We're not meaningless biological events. We were made on purpose, for purpose, by a Creator who knew us before the foundation of the world. Every broken story, every wasted season, every painful chapter—all of it becomes raw material for the Redeemer who specializes in bringing beauty from ashes, making all things new.

## **Lyrics: Redemption Story**

### **[Verse 1]**

Before the stars adorned the night,  
Before the sun gave earth its light,  
The Word was spoken, creation came,  
Through Jesus, the Maker, who knew our name.  
He formed the earth, the skies, the seas,  
Breathed life into humanity.

From dust we rose, His Spirit's flame,  
To bear His image, to praise His name.

**[Chorus]**

From the beginning, His love was displayed,  
Through every fall, His promise stayed.  
A Savior's grace, a story divine,  
Redemption secured for hearts like mine.

**[Outro]**

Oh, the cross, where mercy flows,  
The empty grave, the story shows.  
Sin defeated, love prevailed,  
Through Christ alone, redemption hailed.  
Oh, the cross, where hope is found,  
His grace abounds, His love profound.  
He bore the weight, the debt was paid,  
In Him, the victory's displayed.

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Your story fits within God's Story.** You're not a random accident—you're part of the grand narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration that spans all history.
- **Nothing in your life is wasted.** Every season, even the painful ones, can be redeemed. God weaves even your failures and wounds into a tapestry of purpose and beauty.
- **You have a redemptive role to play.** Your transformed life becomes part of how God redeems others. Your scars become credentials, your story becomes testimony, your healing becomes hope.



- **The Gospel is THE Story that makes sense of your story.**

Understanding the larger biblical narrative helps you see where you fit and why your life matters eternally.

## **Reflections for the Road**

### **1. Where do you see your story fitting into the redemption arc?**

Look back at your life. Can you identify creation (who you were made to be), fall (your swamp), redemption (your water's edge), and restoration (the journey since then)? Be specific. Write it down using the framework in "Practice: Telling Your Redemption Story" below.

#### **1. Creation - Who you were made to be**

Before the swamp.. Before the brokenness..

#### **2. Fall - Your swamp**

Name it.. Be specific..

#### **3. Redemption - Your water's edge encounter**

When did you meet grace?. What was your turning point?.

#### **4. Restoration - The journey since then**

This is where you are now.. Between "already redeemed" and "not yet fully restored." What has God been doing?.

#### **5. Consummation - The hope ahead**

How does the promise of final restoration shape how you live now?. One day, all things will be made new..

#### **6. Share your story**

Your redemption story isn't just for you.. It's a testimony of God's faithfulness that can encourage others..

## **Closing Image**

You're standing at the edge of a vast tapestry. So large you can't see the whole thing. So intricate you can't count the threads.

But you can see your section. The part you've been working on. The threads you've been weaving.

From up close, it looks messy. Dark threads mixed with light. Broken places where the pattern seems chaotic.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 12)

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

### Chapter 12: Nothing is Wasted

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." — Romans 8:28*

Nothing is Wasted

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylertthomas.com/smBjeW>



*Scan to listen: Nothing is Wasted*

### An Invitation to Believe the Impossible

You've come through eleven chapters. You've seen your story within God's story. You've discovered purpose, rhythm, depth.

But now I need to ask you the hardest question yet:

**When you look back at your life—really look back—what do you see?**

Be honest. Do you see years in that toxic relationship? The job you stayed at too long because you were too afraid to leave? The ministry that blew up spectacularly? The friendships you let die because you were too proud? The opportunities you missed?

When you look back, do you see a timeline full of black holes? Years where nothing good grew. Nothing valuable was learned. Just... waste?

Here's the question that haunts many of us: *Can God really redeem this? Or are some things just... lost?*

The enemy whispers: "Those years are gone. That potential is wasted. Those relationships are dead. You can't get it back. It's too late."

But here's what I've discovered, and it's the most scandalous promise in Scripture:

**In God's economy, nothing is wasted. Not "almost nothing." Not "most things." Nothing.**

Every tear. Every failure. Every lost year. Every broken relationship. Every season you wish you could erase—God can redeem it all.

This doesn't mean the pain wasn't real. It doesn't mean the consequences don't matter. It doesn't minimize the loss.

It means God specializes in turning crucifixions into resurrections. He takes what looks like absolute waste and transforms it into raw material for redemption.

This chapter is about believing the impossible: that the years you thought were lost have been woven into a larger story of transformation.

That nothing—absolutely nothing—is wasted in His hands.

So before you continue, pause. This is hard to believe. I know. Consider:

*Can you say, even with doubt mixed in: "God, I don't see how You can redeem those years. But I'm willing to believe You can. I'm willing to trust that even the seasons I wish I could erase are being woven into something purposeful. Show me how nothing is wasted."*

That's the prayer that opens eyes to redemption.

Because what comes next isn't just theological theory. It's the scandalous truth that changes how you see your entire timeline.

Let's be brutally honest about what waste feels like. Because if you've looked back at your timeline and seen black holes, you know this geography intimately.

Waste feels like:

- **Time you can never recover.** Years spent in patterns that brought nothing but destruction.
- **Potential squandered.** The person you could have become if you'd made different choices.
- **Relationships damaged beyond repair.** Bridges burned. Trust shattered. No going back.
- **Opportunities missed.** Doors that closed while you were too paralyzed to walk through them.
- **Lessons learned too late.** Wisdom that came after the damage was already done.

This isn't just regret. Regret is "I wish I'd done that differently." Waste is "That season contributed nothing. It's just gone."

And the question that haunts you: *Can God really redeem this? Or are some things just... lost?*

The enemy whispers: "Those years are gone. That potential is wasted. Those relationships are dead. You can't get it back. It's too late."

But grace whispers something different: "In God's economy, nothing is wasted. Not 'almost nothing.' Not 'most things.' Nothing."

Every tear. Every failure. Every lost year. Every broken relationship. Every season you wish you could erase—God can redeem it all.

This doesn't mean the pain wasn't real. It doesn't mean the consequences don't matter. It doesn't minimize the loss.

It means God specializes in turning crucifixions into resurrections. He takes what looks like absolute waste and transforms it into raw material for redemption.

This is the scandalous promise: nothing—absolutely nothing—is wasted in His hands.

## **Key Themes**

### **1. Timeline Reflection: The Sacred Work of Looking Back**

Part of believing nothing is wasted is doing the hard work of timeline reflection. Not to dwell in the past, but to understand how the past has shaped the present.

This isn't nostalgia. It's not rumination. It's the intentional practice of asking:

- What moments brought joy?
- What moments brought pain?
- What patterns emerged?
- Where was grace at work even when I couldn't see it?

I've done this exercise multiple times over the years. Drew my timeline. Marked the major seasons—the joyful ones and the painful

ones. The seasons of growth and the seasons of wandering.

And every time, I discover the same thing: grace was present even when I couldn't feel it. God was working even when I couldn't see it.

The years I thought were wasted? They taught me what I couldn't learn anywhere else. My desperate need for grace. Compassion for others who struggle. The cost of pride and the beauty of humility.

Even the wasted years became the very years that prepared me for the work I'm doing now.

Timeline reflection requires courage. It means looking honestly at seasons you'd rather forget. But it also reveals something profound: grace threads through every season. Even the dark ones.

The thread of redemption. The thread that says: nothing is wasted.

## **2. Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah: The Test That Reveals**

The story in Genesis 22 is one of the most challenging in all of Scripture. God asks Abraham to offer his son Isaac—the son of promise, the one through whom all nations would be blessed—as a sacrifice.

Abraham obeys. He takes Isaac up Mount Moriah. He builds the altar. He binds his son. He raises the knife.

And God provides a ram in the thicket. Isaac is spared. The promise is preserved.

*"Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means 'the LORD will provide'). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.'" — Genesis 22:14 (NLT)*

What could have been the most tragic waste—the death of the promised son—becomes instead a revelation of God's character. The Lord provides. Always. Even when it seems impossible.

This is the promise for you: God specializes in last-minute provision. In eleventh-hour intervention. In turning what looks like absolute waste into absolute redemption.

The test itself wasn't wasted. The fear wasn't wasted. The faith required to obey wasn't wasted.

All of it became part of the story that would be told for generations: on the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.

And in your life, the seasons that felt like tests—the moments when you had to let go of what you loved most, when you had to trust God with impossible outcomes—those weren't wasted either.

They were the ground where provision came. Where faith grew. Where you learned that God really does provide.

### **3. Romans 8:28 Rightly Understood**

Perhaps no verse is more quoted—and more misunderstood—than Romans 8:28:

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

This doesn't mean everything that happens is good. It doesn't mean God causes evil so good can result. It doesn't mean we should minimize pain by slapping a spiritual Band-Aid on it.

What it does mean is this: God is relentlessly committed to redeeming every moment of your story. Even the worst ones. Even the ones that feel utterly wasted.

God is at work, weaving them into something good.



Not always good you can see in the moment. Sometimes not good you'll see in this lifetime. But good nonetheless. Eternal good. The kind of good that redeems every wasted season and makes it count for eternity.

I held this verse at arm's length for years. Because it felt like a platitude. Like minimizing real pain with Christian clichés.

But it's not a platitude. It's a promise. A promise that your pain has purpose. Your suffering isn't random. Your struggles aren't wasted.

God is working—actively, intentionally, lovingly—to bring good from it all.

*"God wastes nothing—not even sin. The soul that has struggled and come through is enriched by its struggle, and the grace of God is not frustrated." — Evelyn Underhill, The Spiritual Life*

#### **4. Suffering to Compassion: The Transformation**

One of the most profound ways God ensures nothing is wasted is by transforming our suffering into compassion. What once wounded us becomes the very thing that equips us to heal others.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." — 2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

Your struggle isn't wasted when it becomes the testimony that gives someone else hope.

Your scars aren't wasted when they become the proof that wounds can heal.

I've seen this in my own life. The years I spent in the swamp? They weren't wasted. Because now when someone else is drowning, I can sit with them in the muck and say, "I've been here. I know this place. And there's a way out."

The toxic relationships I stayed in too long? They taught me about codependency, about people-pleasing, about the cost of losing yourself. And now I can help others recognize those patterns before the damage goes as deep.

The ministry position that blew up? It taught me about burnout, about the danger of deriving identity from what you do instead of who you are. And now I can warn others away from that cliff.

Nothing is wasted because every experience—even the painful ones—can become a gift to others.

The years you thought were lost become the very years that qualify you to speak into someone else's lostness.

The seasons you thought were wasted become the seasons that prepare you for kingdom work.

## **5. Counting the Cost: Present and Future**

Timeline reflection looks backward. But the work of "nothing is wasted" also requires looking forward—counting the cost of present choices.

This isn't just about past choices and their consequences. It's about present ones.

What kind of life do I want to live now? What brings me life? What drains me? Am I pursuing what's actually fulfilling, or just what's familiar?

These questions themselves are grace—invitations to live more intentionally, more authentically, more aligned with who God is calling you to become.

Counting the cost means asking: If my future self could speak to me today, what would they want me to know? What choices would they be grateful I made? What patterns would they wish I'd broken sooner?

This isn't anxiety about the future. It's wisdom. It's stewarding today in light of tomorrow. It's believing that even this moment—this choice, this breath, this step—matters eternally.

Nothing wasted means: this day counts. This conversation counts. This choice counts. Because God is redeeming not just your past, but your present and future too.

## **The Core Scripture Truth**

**Genesis 22:14** - "So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The Lord will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'"

**Romans 8:28** - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

These two passages—separated by centuries—speak the same truth: God is in the business of redemption. Of provision. Of ensuring that nothing is wasted in His hands.

Genesis 22 shows us God's character: He is the God who provides. Even when the test is unbearable. Even when obedience seems to contradict the promise. Even at the last possible moment. God provides.

Romans 8 shows us God's commitment: He works all things—not some things, but all things—for the good of those who love Him.

This isn't wishful thinking. It's covenant faithfulness. God has bound Himself to redeem your story, no matter how broken the chapters.

Together, these passages form the theological foundation for believing nothing is wasted:

**God's provision is certain.** On the mountain of the Lord—in your darkest moments, your most desperate situations—provision will be made. It may not come when you expect. It may not look like you imagined. But it will come.

**God's redemption is comprehensive.** All things. Not just the good things. Not just the spiritual things. All things. Every moment, every experience, every pain, every struggle—God is working it for good.

This doesn't mean the pain wasn't real. It doesn't mean the waste didn't hurt.

It means God specializes in turning waste into wonder. Ashes into beauty. Mourning into dancing.

In the economy of God, nothing is wasted. Each tear, each failure, each loss becomes an opportunity for grace.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

**The shift from regret to redemption doesn't happen all at once. It happens one memory at a time.**

For years, I carried a deep sense of regret. Time wasted. Opportunities missed. Relationships broken. Years spent in patterns that brought nothing but pain.

I would look back and see waste. Just waste. And the weight of it was crushing.

But slowly—so slowly—I began to see differently. Not because the facts changed. But because my understanding of God's character deepened.

The mistakes taught me compassion for others who struggle.

I began doing timeline work—intentionally looking back at my life and tracing the thread of grace through every season. The joyful seasons and the painful ones. The seasons of growth and the seasons of wandering.

What felt like lost years became the very years that made me who I am.

And if God can redeem my wasteland, He can redeem yours too.

## **Song Integration**

My therapist laid out the timeline of my life across the table and asked, "Do you see the thread?"

I didn't. All I saw were the wasted years.

The years I spent in addiction. The relationships I destroyed. The opportunities I squandered. The people I hurt. The potential I buried. All I could see was waste—years that could have been productive, holy, fruitful, but instead were consumed by my brokenness and sin.

But she kept pointing: "Look at this season. What did you learn here? And here—who did you meet that changed everything? And this moment when you thought you were furthest from God—look what happened next." Slowly, reluctantly, I began to see it. The thread. Not a straight line of progress, but a meandering path of grace that wove through even my darkest seasons, redeeming what I thought was irredeemable.

"Nothing is Wasted" came from that session and countless ones after it. The song captures the scandalous promise of Romans 8:28—that God works ALL things together for good. Not just the good things. Not just the obedient seasons. Not just the victories. ALL things. Every failure becomes a lesson. Every wound becomes a source of compassion. Every wasted year becomes raw material in God's hands. This isn't cheap positivity or spiritual bypass. This is the costly,

mysterious, relentless work of a Redeemer who refuses to let any part of our story—even the parts we're ashamed of—go unredeemed.

## **Lyrics: Nothing is Wasted**

### **[Verse 1]**

You asked me to let go of what I held too tight  
The plans I made, the dreams I shaped, the pieces of my life  
I tried to hold it all together, afraid of what I'd lose  
But love means laying down the outcome  
And trusting everything to You

### **[Chorus]**

You will provide, You always do  
Even when I don't know what You're leading me through  
Even when I walk through fire, You stay in the flame  
You hold my sorrow, You know my name  
In the valley, in the waiting, I have tasted  
In the economy of Your love, nothing is wasted

### **[Outro]**

You don't waste the waiting, You don't waste the pain  
Even when I'm walking through fire or rain  
Every breath I breathe, every pain I've tasted  
In the economy of Your love, nothing is wasted

## **Key Takeaways**

- **God redeems every wasted season.** Romans 8:28 promises that God works ALL things—not just good things—together for good

for those who love Him. Your painful past isn't disqualified; it's raw material for redemption.

- **Suffering can birth compassion.** The pain you've walked through equips you to comfort others in similar struggles. Your wounds become the very thing that allows you to reach people no one else can.

- **Count the cost, then trust the process.** Following Jesus requires sacrifice, but what you gain far outweighs what you give up. The pearl of great price is worth selling everything else.

- **Jehovah Jireh—God provides.** Just as He provided a ram for Abraham when Isaac was on the altar, God provides what you need at the exact moment you need it. Trust His timing, not your anxiety.

## Reflections for the Road

### Questions for the Journey:

- What season of your life feels most "wasted"? Name it. Where do you carry the most regret?
- Do timeline work: Map your life in seasons. Mark the major ones—joyful and painful. Where do you see patterns? Where do you see the thread of grace?
- What suffering in your life might God want to transform into compassion for others? Where have you been wounded? How might that pain become the bridge to someone else's healing?
- Read Genesis 22 and Romans 8:28 slowly. What is God saying to you about provision and redemption?

### 1. Draw your timeline

On a large piece of paper, draw a horizontal line representing your life from birth to now. Mark major life events.

## **2. Mark the spiritual seasons**

Using different colors, mark seasons of growth, wandering, suffering, joy.. Be honest..

## **3. Look for the thread of grace**

Go back over your timeline and look for moments of grace—even in the hardest seasons.. Where did God show up?.

## **4. Name what you're learning**

For each major season, write a one-sentence summary of what you learned or how you grew.. Even the painful seasons..

## **5. Write a prayer of redemption**

End by asking God to redeem every season. To use even the wasted years for His glory and your good.

## **Closing Image**

You're standing on the mountain now. Not Mount Moriah exactly, but your own mountain. The place where you've laid down what you held most dear.

And as you look back down the mountain at the path you've climbed, you see something you missed on the way up.

Every step—even the ones that felt like backsliding. Every turn—even the wrong ones. Every season—even the wasted ones. They all led here.



# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 13)

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

### Chapter 13: Devil's On The Run

*"Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." — Colossians 2:15*

Devil's On The Run

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylerthomas.com/xSXwkH>



*Scan to listen: Devil's On The Run*

### An Invitation to Stand

You've walked through twelve chapters. You've experienced rescue, rhythm, depth, redemption. You've discovered that nothing is wasted.

But now I need to ask you something crucial:

**When the accusations come at 3 AM—when they feel true—do you know where you're standing?**

You know these voices. They always show up in the dark, in the quiet, when you're too tired to fight back effectively:

*You're not really forgiven. God's still angry. You've failed too many times. You'll never be free. This sin is too big.*

And here's what makes it so hard: sometimes it feels like all the progress you've made is fragile. One accusation away from crumbling.

The enemy whispers: *See? You haven't really changed. This is who you are. This is who you'll always be.*

But here's what I've discovered, and it's the truth that changes the battle:

**This isn't a fight for victory. It's a fight from victory.**

The war is already over. The enemy has already been defeated. You're not fighting to win—you're enforcing the win that's already been won.

Colossians 2:15 says: "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Disarmed. Public spectacle. Triumphed.

Past tense. Done. Finished.

This chapter is about the fundamental shift from desperate warfare to confident standing. From fighting for freedom to standing in freedom. From resisting from fear to resisting from rest.

The devil is on the run. Not because you're strong. Because Christ is victorious.

And you—standing in Christ's victory—don't have to earn freedom. You just have to stand in the freedom that's already yours.

So before you continue, pause. Consider:

*Can you say, even when the accusations feel true: "Jesus, the cross. The cross settles this. I'm not fighting for victory—I'm standing in victory. The enemy is defeated. I resist from rest, and he flees."*

That's the declaration that shifts the battle.

Because what comes next isn't about fighting harder. It's about standing firmer.

Let's be honest about what spiritual warfare feels like. Because if you've been in the fight, you know it's not theoretical. It's visceral.

Spiritual warfare feels like:

- **Accusations that feel true.** "You're not really forgiven. God's still angry. You've failed too many times."
- **Temptations perfectly tailored to your weaknesses.** The enemy knows where you're vulnerable.
- **Despair that whispers "give up."** What's the point? You'll never change. This is who you are.
- **Isolation.** The lie that you're alone. That no one else struggles like this. That if people knew, they'd reject you.
- **Confusion.** Feeling like you can't tell God's voice from the enemy's lies from your own thoughts.

But here's the shift: spiritual warfare from victory feels different.

When you're fighting from victory instead of for victory, the battle changes:

- **Accusations lose their power.** Not because they stop coming, but because you know they're lies. The cross settles it.

- **Temptations don't define you.** You're not your struggles. You're beloved. The temptation is an attack, not an identity.
- **Despair has no ground.** Hope is anchored in Christ's finished work, not your performance.
- **Isolation breaks.** You're part of a body. Connected. Not alone.
- **Truth becomes clear.** God's voice sounds like grace. The enemy's voice sounds like accusation. And you're learning the difference.

The battlefield is still real. The enemy still attacks. But you're not desperately fighting for freedom anymore.

You're standing in freedom. Enforcing victory. Resisting from rest.

## **Key Themes**

### **1. Fighting From Victory, Not For Victory**

This is the fundamental shift. And it changes everything.

When you're fighting for victory, every battle feels desperate. Every temptation is a potential defeat. Every accusation carries the weight of judgment. You're trying to earn something, prove something, secure something through your effort.

But when you're fighting from victory, the pressure's off. You're not trying to earn freedom—you're protecting freedom that's already yours. You're not hoping to overcome—you're standing in the overcoming power of Christ.

James 4:7: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Notice what it doesn't say. It doesn't say "fight the devil until you're exhausted, and maybe he'll leave."

It says resist, and he will flee. Automatic. Guaranteed. The fleeing isn't something you make happen—it's the result of your positioning.

You resist, and he runs. Every time.

Why? Because he's already defeated. And he knows it.

You're not fighting to win. Christ won. You're enforcing that win. Standing in that victory. And when you do, the enemy has no choice but to flee.

C.S. Lewis explains the Christian's unique position:

*"The Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They hope, by being good, to please God if there is one; or—if they think there is not—at least they hope to deserve approval from good men. But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him." — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity*

We're not fighting in our own strength. We're fighting from Christ's strength already at work in us.

## **2. The Lies of the Enemy vs. The Truth of Grace**

The devil's primary weapon isn't force—it's deception. He can't take your salvation. He can't reverse what Christ has done. But he can lie to you about it.

And if he can get you to believe the lies, he can render you ineffective.

*"You're not really forgiven."*

*"God is still angry with you."*

*"You've failed too many times."*

*"You'll never be free."*

*"This sin is too big for grace."*

Lies. All of them. But lies that feel true when you're in the swamp, when you're struggling, when you can't see clearly.

The antidote is truth. Not just knowing it intellectually, but anchoring your identity in it.

**You are forgiven—completely, fully, eternally:**

*"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." — 1 John 1:9 (NLT)*

**God is not angry with you—His wrath was satisfied at the cross:**

*"Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." — Romans 5:1 (NLT)*

**Your failures don't define you—Christ's righteousness does:**

*"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ." — 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)*

You are free—the chains are broken, the prison door is open (John 8:36).

No sin is too big for grace—grace is bigger than all of them combined (Romans 5:20).

When you stand in these truths, the lies lose their power. The accusations fall flat. The enemy has nothing to work with.

Because truth always defeats lies. And grace always trumps accusation.

*"The devil is a better theologian than any of us and is a devil still." — A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy*

The enemy knows Scripture. He knows theology. But knowledge without submission is worthless. We don't defeat him with superior arguments—we defeat him by standing in the truth of who we are in Christ.

### **3. Colossians 2:15 – The Public Spectacle**

One of the most powerful verses about spiritual warfare is Colossians 2:15:

*"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."*

This is the picture: Jesus on the cross, seemingly defeated. The enemy celebrating. But in that moment of apparent defeat, Jesus is actually stripping the enemy of every weapon, every claim, every authority.

And then—resurrection. The ultimate reversal. Death swallowed up in victory. The grave defeated. Satan disarmed. A public spectacle made of all the powers of darkness.

Disarmed. Every weapon the enemy had—sin, death, condemnation, accusation—was stripped away. He has no legitimate claim. No legal ground. No authority.

Public spectacle. The victory wasn't secret or private. It was public. Visible. Undeniable. The powers of darkness were put on display—defeated, humiliated, powerless.

Triumphing. This is the language of a victory parade. Jesus didn't just win—He celebrated. The cross wasn't Plan B. It was the plan. And it worked perfectly.

This is why the devil is on the run. He has no authority anymore. His power was stripped at the cross. His claims were nullified in the resurrection. All he has left are lies and fear—and both crumble in the presence of truth and faith.

Charles Stanley identifies the enemy's real strategy:

*"Satan's primary objective is not to lead you into a blatant sin. It's to get you to live independently of God." — Charles Stanley, When the Enemy Strikes*

This is the core battle. Not spectacular moral failures, but subtle independence. Living like you don't need God. Making decisions without Him. Trusting yourself instead of Him. This is where the real warfare happens.

#### **4. The Danger of Giving the Enemy Too Much Credit**

There's a danger on the other side of spiritual warfare: giving the devil too much credit. Making him seem more powerful than he is. Living in constant fear of his schemes.

But the truth is, the devil is a defeated foe. He's on a leash. His time is limited. His power is broken. And he has no authority over those who are in Christ.

This doesn't mean we ignore spiritual warfare. It means we engage it from the right posture—not fear, but confidence. Not paranoia, but awareness. Not obsession with the enemy, but focus on Christ.

Some Christians see a demon behind every bush. Others deny the reality of spiritual warfare altogether. The truth is in the middle: the enemy is real, but he's already defeated.

We need to be aware, but not afraid. Alert, but not anxious. Resisting, but resting in Christ's victory.

The devil is on the run. That's the truth. But don't spend your life looking over your shoulder for him.



Keep your eyes on Jesus. Stand firm in truth. And when the enemy shows up with his lies and accusations, resist him with confidence—knowing that he has no choice but to flee.

## **5. Walking in Freedom, Not Just Fighting for It**

The ultimate goal of understanding spiritual warfare isn't just to fight better—it's to walk in freedom. To live in the victory that Christ has won. To stop constantly battling and start consistently abiding.

Too many Christians spend their entire lives in spiritual warfare mode—always fighting, always resisting, always on guard. And while vigilance is important, it's not the whole picture.

The whole picture is this: Christ has set you free. The chains are broken. The prison door is open. The devil is defeated.

Your job isn't to keep fighting for that freedom. It's to walk in it. To live from it. To let it shape how you think, how you respond, how you engage with life.

Galatians 5:1: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Stand firm in freedom. Don't go back to slavery. Don't pick up chains that Christ has already broken. Don't believe lies that Christ has already exposed as false.

The devil is on the run. And you're free to live like it.

## **The Core Scripture Truth**

**Colossians 2:13-15** - "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

The cross is the turning point of all spiritual warfare. What looked like defeat was actually the decisive victory.

Jesus didn't just survive the enemy's attack—He dismantled it.

**Disarmed.** Every weapon the enemy had—sin, death, condemnation, accusation—was stripped away. He has no legitimate claim. No legal ground. No authority.

**Public spectacle.** The victory wasn't secret or private. It was public. Visible. Undeniable. The powers of darkness were put on display—defeated, humiliated, powerless.

**Triumphing.** This is the language of a victory parade. Jesus didn't just win—He celebrated. The cross wasn't Plan B. It was the plan. And it worked perfectly.

This is the theological foundation for "the devil is on the run." Not wishful thinking. Not positive confession. Not spiritual bravado.

Reality. Accomplished fact. The cross changed everything.

Ephesians 6:10-11: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

Notice: you're strong in the Lord, not in yourself. The armor is God's armor, not your own. And the call is to stand, not to fight for ground you don't have.

You're holding ground that's already been won. Standing in victory that's already been secured. Resisting an enemy who's already been defeated.

This is spiritual warfare from rest. From confidence. From the unforced rhythms of grace.

And in Him, you share that victory.

## **The Wayfarer Moment**

The shift from fighting for victory to fighting from victory changed everything for me.

For years, I felt like I was barely holding on. Every temptation was a potential defeat. Every accusation felt true. Every battle left me exhausted, wondering if I'd survive the next one.

I was fighting for victory—trying to earn it, prove it, secure it through my effort and willpower.

Wait. The enemy is already disarmed? Already defeated? Already on the run?

And slowly—so slowly—I began to shift. From fighting for victory to fighting from victory. From desperation to confidence. From fear to faith.

And every time I stood on truth, the lies lost their power. The accusations fell flat. The enemy fled.

But more and more, I'm living from victory instead of for it. Resisting from rest instead of from fear. Standing in confidence because Christ has already triumphed.

## **Song Integration**

The attack came when I thought I was finally safe. I'd been out of the swamp, washed at the water's edge, learning the rhythms, sending roots deep. Then the accusations started—relentless, day and night. "You're not really changed. You'll always be that person. You'll never be free." I was exhausted, barely holding on, wondering if the enemy was right. I was fighting for my freedom, fighting to prove I was really changed, fighting to hold onto ground I'd gained. And I was losing.

Then something happened. I was reading Colossians 2, barely able to focus, when verse 15 leaped off the page: *"Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."* Three words stopped me: **Disarmed. Public spectacle. Triumphed.** In that moment, I realized what I'd been doing wrong.

## Lyrics: Devil's On The Run

### [Verse 1]

Devil on the run  
He's a wicked beast  
Tried to take me down  
But he lost his feast  
He kicked me hard  
Left me buried deep  
But I rose in grace  
While he lost his keep

### [Chorus]

Now I rise, now I run  
By the power of the Son  
But the Devil is a liar  
He's Done!!  
Ain't no grace where he's from  
Tried to steal, tried to kill  
But my soul he couldn't take  
Devil's on the run  
'Cause I'm saved by grace

## Key Takeaways

- **Fight from victory, not for victory.** The battle was won at the cross. You're not fighting to defeat the enemy—you're enforcing Christ's already-accomplished victory by standing firm in truth.
- **The devil is already defeated.** Colossians 2:15 declares that Jesus disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them. Don't give a defeated enemy more credit than he deserves.
- **Lies lose power when exposed to truth.** The enemy's primary weapon is deception. When you identify the lie and speak God's truth over it, the stronghold crumbles. Light always dispels darkness.
- **Walk in the freedom Christ secured.** You're not in bondage anymore—you're free. Live like it. Resist the devil from a place of rest, not fear, knowing he must flee when you stand firm.

## Reflections for the Road

### Questions for the Journey:

- Where are you still fighting for victory instead of from victory? What battles feel desperate? Where do you feel like you're barely holding on?
- What lies has the enemy been whispering to you? Write them down. Be specific. Now counter each lie with Scripture. Find the truth that exposes the lie.
- Read Colossians 2:15 slowly. What does it mean that Jesus "disarmed" the enemy? What weapons does the enemy no longer have?

- Are you giving the devil too much credit—or not enough? What would a balanced approach look like?

### **1. Identify the lie**

What is the enemy whispering to you?. What accusation feels most powerful?.

### **2. Find the countering truth**

Search Scripture for the truth that directly counters the lie. For example:

- Lie: "You're not really forgiven." Truth: 1 John 1:9, Colossians 1:13-14
- Lie: "God is angry with you." Truth: Romans 5:1, Romans 8:1
- Lie: "You'll never be free." Truth: John 8:36, Galatians 5:1

### **3. Declare the truth out loud**

Don't just think it.. Speak it..

### **4. Stand firm**

The lie will come back.. That's what the enemy does..

### **5. Thank God for the victory**

End by thanking God for the victory that's already been won.. For the truth that sets you free..

## **Closing Image**

You're standing on the battlefield, but the battle is over. The smoke is clearing. The enemy is retreating. And you realize—you didn't win this fight. Christ did.

The victory was secured long before you arrived. The cross was the decisive blow. The resurrection was the final confirmation. The enemy was disarmed, defeated, sent running.

Your role wasn't to win. It was to stand. To hold the ground that Christ won. To resist an enemy who has no choice but to flee.

# Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 14)

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

### Chapter 14: Living in the Moment

*"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is what you are to say... 'I AM has sent me to you.'" — Exodus 3:14*

This Moment is Enough

**Listen at:** <http://go.skylertthomas.com/jIthAe>



*Scan to listen: This Moment is Enough*

### An Invitation to Be Here

You've journeyed through thirteen chapters. From swamp to water's edge. From crisis to rhythm. From scattered to rooted. From waste to redemption. From defeat to victory.

But now I need to ask you one final question:



Not physically. Mentally. Emotionally. Spiritually.

**Breath.** Deep, full, unforced. Not gasping for what's gone or hyperventilating about what's coming.

- **Attention.** Actually listening to the person in front of you instead of mentally rehearsing your response.
- **Gratitude.** Noticing what's here instead of obsessing over what's missing.
- **Rest.** Not from activity, but in activity. Working from presence instead of from anxiety.
- **Trust.** Believing that today's grace is sufficient for today. And tomorrow's will come tomorrow.

But here's what living in the present might also feel like, at least at first:

- **Discomfort.** Because the present requires you to feel what you've been avoiding.
- **Boredom.** Because you're so used to constant stimulation and distraction.
- **Vulnerability.** Because being here means acknowledging what's actually true right now.
- **Fear.** Because if you're not planning for tomorrow or fixing yesterday, what if everything falls apart?

This is normal. Because presence challenges everything our culture teaches us about productivity, control, and security.

Our culture says: Plan everything. Control outcomes. Never slow down.

Grace says: Be here now. Trust God with outcomes. Rest is not weakness.

Presence is a practice. A discipline. A choice you make moment by moment to come back here, to this breath, to this moment, to this sufficient grace.

## Key Themes

### 1. God's Name is "I AM" – Present Tense

*"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." — Exodus 3:14*

Present tense. Always.

God isn't just the God of your past—though He was faithful there. He isn't just the God of your future—though He'll be faithful there too.

He is the God of your present. Here. Now. In this moment.

This changes everything. Because if God is present-tense, then His grace is present-tense too. Not stored up from yesterday. Not held back until tomorrow. Here. Now. Sufficient for this moment.

Paul writes: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Sufficient. Not abundant for tomorrow. Not excess for next week. Sufficient for today. For this moment. For this need.

That's all you need. And it's enough.

I spent years trying to secure tomorrow's grace today. Planning obsessively. Preparing for every contingency. Trying to control outcomes that weren't mine to control.

And I was exhausted. Anxious. Never present.

But when I learned to trust that God's grace is sufficient for this moment—and that tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow—I began to

rest.

Not the rest of inactivity. The rest of presence. Being here. Trusting now.

Jesus addresses our tendency to borrow tomorrow's worries:

*"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." — Matthew 6:34*

This isn't fatalism. It's wisdom.

Today has enough to carry. Don't make it heavier by adding what hasn't happened yet.

I'm a worrier by nature. My mind races to worst-case scenarios. What if this happens? What if that fails? What if everything falls apart?

And Jesus says: Stop. Come back to today. Today has enough. You don't need to carry tomorrow too.

This is freedom. Real freedom. The freedom to engage fully with what's right in front of you instead of being paralyzed by what might come.

Living in the moment doesn't mean being oblivious to the future. It means trusting that God will give you what you need when you need it. That tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow. That today's grace is sufficient for today.

Corrie ten Boom, who lived through the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, learned this truth:

*"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength." — Corrie ten Boom, Clippings from My Notebook*

If anyone had reason to worry about tomorrow, it was Corrie. But she discovered that borrowing tomorrow's troubles only robs today of the grace needed to live it well.

### **3. The Manna Experience: Daily Bread**

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God provided manna every morning. Daily bread. But the instruction was clear: gather only what you need for today. Don't try to hoard tomorrow's provision.

Those who tried to keep extra found it rotting by morning. The lesson: trust today's provision for today. Tomorrow will have its own.

This is living in the moment. Not grasping for more than you need. Not anxiously securing tomorrow. Just receiving today's grace and trusting tomorrow's will come.

*"Give us this day our daily bread." — Matthew 6:11*

Not weekly bread. Not monthly bread. Daily bread.

### **4. Mary and Martha: The Better Choice**

The story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) perfectly captures the tension between doing and being, between productivity and presence.

Martha is distracted by preparations—good things, necessary things. But she's missing the moment. Missing the presence of Jesus right there in her home.

Mary, on the other hand, sits at Jesus' feet. Present. Attentive. Fully engaged in the moment.

Jesus' words to Martha are gentle but clear:

*"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." — Luke 10:41-42*

The better choice: presence over productivity. Being over doing. This moment with Jesus over the endless list of tasks.

This doesn't mean tasks don't matter. It means they're not the ultimate thing.

The ultimate thing is being present to God's presence. Being attentive to this moment. Being fully here.

I've been Martha most of my life. Busy. Productive. Distracted by preparations. Always doing.

And I've missed moments. Beautiful, sacred, unrepeatable moments because I was too busy to be present.

I'm learning—slowly—to choose Mary's part. To sit. To be. To let the tasks wait while I'm fully present to what matters most.

## **5. Practices of Presence**

### **6. Fixing Your Eyes on Jesus**

Hebrews 12:1-2: "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

The race is now. The moment is here. Fix your eyes.

Not backward eyes that live in regret.

Fixed eyes. On Jesus. On this moment. On the grace that's present right now.

Choosing to see this moment—not as a means to an end, but as the place where God is present.

Choosing to focus on what you can control—your response, your attitude, your obedience—and release what you can't.

Choosing to look at Jesus instead of at the waves. At truth instead of at fear. At grace instead of at guilt.

## The Core Scripture Truth

**Hebrews 12:1-2** - "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

This passage captures the theology of living in the moment.

The race isn't in the past—those miles are behind you. The race isn't in the future—those miles haven't arrived yet. The race is now. This step. This breath. This moment.

And the key to running it well? Fixing your eyes on Jesus.

Not on the finish line so far you can't see it. Not on the starting line you've already left. On Jesus. Who is present. Here. Now.

**Pioneer and perfecter.** Jesus has run this race. He knows the way. And He's with you—not just at the finish, but in this moment.

This is the theological foundation for living in the moment: God is not just the God of your past or your future. He is the God of your present.

The great "I AM"—not "I was" or "I will be," but "I AM." Present tense. Here. Now.

*"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" — 2  
Corinthians 12:9*

Sufficient. Not abundant for tomorrow. Not stored up for next week. Sufficient for today. For this moment. For this need.

That's all you need. And it's enough.

## The Wayfarer Moment

The shift from living in anxiety to living in the moment changed everything for me.

For years, I lived in two time zones: yesterday and tomorrow. I carried regrets from the past and anxieties about the future. The only time zone I wasn't living in was the present.

And I was exhausted. Haunted by what I'd done wrong. Terrified of what might go wrong. Never fully present to what was actually happening.

But slowly, I began to practice presence. Small things at first.

I started asking myself: What does faithfulness look like right now? Not tomorrow. Not in the big picture. Right now.

I'm still learning. My mind still wanders to yesterday's failures and tomorrow's fears. But more and more, I'm able to return. To this moment. To this breath. To this sufficient grace.

## **Song Integration**

I'd spent most of my life living anywhere but the present moment. My mind was either in the past—replaying conversations, regretting decisions, obsessing over what I should have said—or in the future—catastrophizing outcomes, trying to control variables I couldn't control. The present? I was rarely there. Because the present required me to feel, to be vulnerable, to acknowledge what was actually true right now.

Anxiety was my constant companion. The low-grade, ever-present anxiety of someone who can't trust God with the moment in front of him. I was always preparing, always planning, always trying to get ahead of the next crisis. And I was exhausted.

## Lyrics: This Moment is Enough

### [Verse 1]

In the garden mercy covered the fall,  
Two hearts broken, yet God heard the call.  
The waters rose, but His promise remained,  
A rainbow whispered through the pouring rain.  
Love was alive in the moment back then.

### [Chorus]

We're not promised tomorrow, only the breath we breathe.  
Here in this moment, God's mercy never leaves.  
From Genesis to Jesus, the story carries us—  
This moment is the promise,  
This moment is enough.

### [Outro]

These ancient stories are the ground beneath our feet,  
The God of creation still makes our lives complete.  
From the garden to the cross, from the grave to today,  
The God who redeemed them is redeeming us the same.

## Key Takeaways

- **God's name is "I AM"—present tense, not past or future.** He meets you in this moment, not in yesterday's regrets or tomorrow's anxieties. This moment is where His presence and grace are available.
- **Sufficient grace for today is enough.** Like manna in the wilderness, God's grace is given daily. Don't hoard yesterday's grace or borrow tomorrow's worry—receive what's here, now.



- **Presence over productivity.** Mary chose the better part—sitting at Jesus' feet—while Martha stressed over serving. Being with God matters more than doing for God.

- **Fix your eyes on Jesus, not the waves.** Hebrews 12:2 urges you to focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. When you look at circumstances, you sink. When you look at Him, you walk on water.

## **Reflections for the Road**

### **1. Where do you spend most of your mental energy—past, present, or future?**

Be honest. Are you replaying yesterday's conversations? Rehearsing tomorrow's scenarios? Catastrophizing outcomes that may never happen? Notice where your mind goes when it wanders. Write it down.

What is one specific thing you're carrying from yesterday or borrowing from tomorrow that's weighing down your today?

### **2. Read Exodus 3:14 and Matthew 6:34 slowly.**

"I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). God's name is present tense. And Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

If God is "I AM" (not "I was" or "I will be"), and tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow, what does that mean for this moment right now? Is this moment enough?

### **3. What does "fixing your eyes on Jesus" look like practically for you today?**

Not wandering eyes that constantly look around at what might go wrong. Not backward eyes living in regret. Not anxious eyes straining

to see the distant future. Fixed eyes. On Jesus. On this moment.

What does that actually look like in your life today? When you notice your mind wandering to past or future, what will you do to bring it back to this moment?

### **1. Become aware of God's presence**

Take a few deep breaths.. Acknowledge that God is present with you right now..

### **2. Review the day with gratitude**

Walk through your day from start to finish.. Notice where you saw God's presence..

### **3. Pay attention to your emotions**

What moments stirred strong emotions—joy, anger, peace, anxiety?. Don't judge them..

### **4. Choose one feature of the day**

Pick one moment that stands out.. Sit with it..

### **5. Look toward tomorrow**

Not with anxiety, but with hope.. What's one thing you're facing tomorrow?.

## **Closing Image**

You're standing at the edge of tomorrow, but you're not stepping into it yet. Not because you're afraid. But because you're learning the sacred art of being here. Now. In this moment.

The sun is setting on today. Tomorrow is still dark, still unknown. But this moment—this space between what was and what will be—is filled with light.

You can feel it. God's presence. Not in yesterday's memory. Not in tomorrow's promise. Here. Now. In this breath.

## **Epilogue: The Road Ahead**

You've journeyed from swamp to water's edge to unforced rhythms. You've named your struggle, cried out in prayer, made the decision to stop and choose life, and discovered that dying to self changes everything.

You've been washed at the water's edge, learning what it means to live in the shadow of grace, receiving what you could never earn, and digging deeper into healing.

And you've begun to walk in the unforced rhythms of grace—sending roots deep, discovering redemption's story woven through your life, learning that nothing is wasted, standing firm because the devil is on the run, and living fully present in this moment.

But here's the truth I need you to hear before you close this book:

**This isn't the end. It's the beginning.**

The Christian life isn't about arriving at some final destination where everything is fixed and all questions are answered. It's about walking with Jesus—day by day, moment by moment, breath by breath.

There will be days when you feel like you're back in the swamp. When old patterns resurface. When shame whispers that you haven't really changed.

On those days, remember: you're not starting over. You're continuing forward. The work God began in you, He is faithful to complete (Philippians 1:6).

There will be days when grace feels distant. When you're exhausted from trying to live up to standards you were never meant to carry.

On those days, come back to the water's edge. Let grace wash over you again. It's not a one-time event—it's a daily returning to the truth of

who you are in Christ.

There will be days when the rhythms feel forced. When life speeds up and you lose your footing in the chaos.

On those days, hear Jesus' invitation again: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The rhythms are always unforced. The striving is always unnecessary. He is always enough.

## What Now?

If you're wondering what to do next, here are a few suggestions:

- 1. Go back through the "Reflections for the Road" questions.** Don't rush. Sit with each one. Journal. Pray. Be honest with God and with yourself.
- 2. Practice one thing from this book consistently.** Maybe it's the Daily Examen from Chapter 14. Maybe it's breath prayers throughout your day. Maybe it's naming your swamp and bringing it to God in honest prayer. Pick one. Do it. Let it become a rhythm.
- 3. Find a community.** This journey isn't meant to be walked alone. Find people who will listen without judgment, who will speak truth in love, who will remind you of grace when you forget.
- 4. Listen to the songs.** Music has a way of reaching places words alone can't touch. Let these songs become part of your prayer life, your worship, your remembering.
- 5. Keep walking.** Some days you'll sprint. Some days you'll crawl. Some days you'll sit still and rest. All of it is part of the journey. Just don't stop moving toward Jesus.

## **A Final Word**

I don't know where you are right now. Maybe you're in the deepest part of the swamp, and this book felt like a lifeline. Maybe you're at the water's edge, tentatively stepping into grace. Maybe you're learning the rhythms and discovering that life with Jesus is better than you imagined.

Wherever you are, know this:

God isn't finished with you.

Grace is still sufficient.

This moment is still enough.

And the One who called you out of the swamp is faithful to walk with you every step of the way.

Keep walking, wayfarer.

The journey is just beginning.

*"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

— Philippians 1:6