Table of Contents

# 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.

# Table of Contents

**Introduction:** The Wayfarer’s Anthem

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

1. **My Swamp**
2. **But Then I Prayed**
3. **STOP!! And Make a Decision**
4. **Dying Changes Everything**

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

1. **Living Waters Edge**
2. **In the Shadow of Your Grace**
3. **Amazing Grace I Did Receive**
4. **Dig a Little Deeper**

## MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS (The Transformation)

1. **Unforced Rhythms of Grace**
2. **Deep Roots, Strong Growth**
3. **Redemption’s Story**
4. **Nothing is Wasted**
5. **Devil’s On The Run**
6. **Living in the Moment**

# 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, measure up, and maybe you’ll be acceptable.

Spirituality says: You’re already known. Already seen. Already loved. Now come find out what that means.

I talk about **God** not as some distant cosmic force or angry judge, but as the source of the love you’ve been searching for your whole life. The kind of love that doesn’t depend on your performance. That doesn’t quit when you mess up. That runs toward you, not away from you.

I talk about **Jesus** not as a religious figure on a stained-glass window, but as God choosing to step into human skin. To live our life. To feel our pain. To show us what Love looks like with hands and feet. He didn’t come to start a religion. He came for people who were drowning—people like you and me.

I talk about **the Spirit** not as some spooky religious concept, but as the presence of God that can actually live in you. That whispers truth when you’re believing lies. That gives you strength when you have none left. That transforms you from the inside out.

**Why would any of this matter to you?**

Because maybe you’ve tried everything else.

Maybe you’ve tried achieving your way to meaning. Working harder. Making more money. Finding the right relationship. Filling the void with whatever you could find. Maybe you’ve even tried to just be a better person through morality (whatever that is). And if you’re honest, it’s all come up short.

Not because you’re doing it wrong. But because you were designed for something deeper. Something that doesn’t break when life breaks. Something that doesn’t end when your heart stops.

An old theologian named Augustine said it like this: *“Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”*

That restlessness you feel? That ache for more? That’s not a flaw. That’s your soul telling you there’s something real to find.

**Here’s what I’m NOT doing:**

I’m not trying to get you to join a church (though finding a good community later might help).

I’m not asking you to become religious (please don’t).

I’m not going to quote a bunch of Bible verses at you like proof-texts (though I will tell you some ancient stories that might surprise you).

**Here’s what I AM doing:**

I’m inviting you to consider that the God you might have given up on never gave up on you.

I’m showing you what it looked like when I stopped running and started being honest.

I’m suggesting that the swamp you’re in might be the exact place where you finally meet Love.

**If you’re thinking:** *“I don’t know if I buy any of this God stuff…”*

Good. Questions are allowed here. Doubt is part of the journey. You don’t have to have it all figured out to keep reading.

**If you’re thinking:** *“I’ve been hurt by religious people…”*

I’m sorry. Truly. The system fails people all the time. Hypocrites are real. Church can wound. But please don’t confuse the failure of religious people with who God actually is.

**If you’re thinking:** *“Why should I give this a try?”*

Because you picked up this book for a reason. Something in you is still searching. Still hoping. Still wondering if there might be more.

And I’m here to tell you: I believe there is.

Not religion. Not performance. Not rules.

But a Love that wades into your swamp.

A grace that meets you exactly where you are.

A Life that doesn’t end when this one does.

**This book is for the messy, the broken, the burned-out, the skeptical, the searching.**

It’s for people who know they don’t have it all together and are tired of pretending otherwise.

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 what one writer called “the impostor”—the false self shaped by others’ expectations rather than who I really was. He wrote:

“The impostor is a liar, a phony, a hypocrite. It is the self presented to the world to gain approval, to win esteem, to be admired. But it’s not who you really are. Living as an impostor means living a lie…”

— Brennan Manning, *Abba’s Child*

That was me.

As “a leader” who felt nothing. I was giving advice I didn’t believe. The person quoting wisdom while drowning in doubt. The “strong one” who was actually drowning.

The years kept accumulating. More money. Recognition. People saying, “Your teaching has really helped me.” Being seen as a technical expert at work. And all the while, the exhaustion grew beneath the performance like water seeping into a foundation, slowly undermining everything.

Then came the moment when the façade cracked.

I can still see it clearly—the counseling session where I finally said out loud: “I don’t know if I believe any of this anymore.”

The words hung in the air like a confession at a trial.

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.

### Movement 1: 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.

### Movement 2: 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.

### Movement 3: 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”**

Throughout this book, I’m going to use the word “scandal” a lot. And I want you to understand why.

A scandal breaks the rules. It violates expectations. It offends sensibilities. It makes people uncomfortable because it doesn’t fit the system they’ve built.

When I say love is “scandalous,” I don’t mean it’s shocking in a tabloid sense. I mean it operates on principles that completely violate the economy we know—the economy of earning, deserving, performing, and paying back.

**The scandal is this:** In every system humans create, love has conditions. Acceptance has requirements. Forgiveness has limits. Acceptance has to be earned.

But love doesn’t have to work that way.

Love says: - “I love you when you’re covered in swamp mud.” (Scandalous—shouldn’t I have to clean up first?) - “I forgive you before you’ve proven you’ve changed.” (Scandalous—shouldn’t I have to earn it?) - “I call you ‘beloved’ when you’re still a mess.” (Scandalous—shouldn’t I have to deserve that title?) - “I meet you in the muck and call it holy ground.” (Scandalous—how can failure be holy?)

This is offensive to our sense of fairness. It violates our understanding of justice. It breaks every rule we have about how love should work.

**That’s the scandal.**

Love isn’t just nice. It’s not just generous. It’s revolutionary. Dangerous. World-upending.

If you could earn it, it wouldn’t be free—it would be payment. If you deserved it, it wouldn’t be love—it would be obligation. 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.

Throughout this book, when you see the word “scandal,” remember: it’s not a problem. It’s the point.

The scandal is what makes it love. The scandal is what makes it real. The scandal is what makes it for you.

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. A pilgrim. A traveler. A wanderer.

Not someone who has arrived, but someone honest enough to admit they’re still on the road. Not someone perfect, but someone willing to keep walking.

The metaphor of journey saturates human wisdom:

* Abraham, called to leave everything familiar and go to a land he would discover as he went
* Ancient peoples, wandering years in the wilderness learning to trust
* Jesus, who had no place to lay his head
* The early spiritual seekers, who called their path “The Way”
* Ancient writers who described believers as “foreigners and strangers on earth” seeking “a better country”

Wayfarers know:

* **The road is long and we’re not there yet** — We’re still becoming who we’re meant to be
* **We’ll walk through swamps, deserts, and dark valleys** — Ancient wisdom promises the valley, not just green pastures
* **We don’t travel alone** — The promise: *“I am with you always”*
* **The point isn’t arrival; it’s learning to walk authentically** — The call is to “walk humbly”
* **Authenticity matters more than appearance** — *“People look at the outward appearance, but the heart is what matters”*
* **Questions are allowed, doubt is part of the journey** — Even the faithful sent messengers asking, *“Are you the one, or should we expect someone else?”*
* **We’re all just beggars telling other beggars where to find bread** — Martin Luther

One teacher describes this wayfaring path:

“The spiritual life is not a life of success but a life of faithfulness. It’s not about never falling, but about getting back up. It’s not about perfection, but about direction.”

— Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*

## 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

If you’re reading this book, chances are you’ve spent a lot of energy trying to appear okay.

Maybe you’ve been the strong one in your family—the one everyone leans on, the one who never breaks down, the one who holds it all together.

Maybe you’ve been the spiritual one—the one with the right answers, the encouraging words, the faith that never wavers (at least publicly).

Maybe you’ve been the successful one—the one who achieves, who produces, who proves their worth through accomplishments.

Or maybe you’ve just been the one who smiles and says “I’m fine” when you’re falling apart inside.

The swamp is where all of that 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 making the shift from “I have to look okay” to “I need help.”

From “I can handle this” to “I’m drowning.”

From “Let me just work harder” to “God, if You’re real, I need You.”

That shift feels like failure. Like weakness. Like giving up.

But it’s actually the beginning of everything.

## The Metaphor: Sinking to Stand

There’s an old story about a man caught in a flood. He climbs to his roof as the water rises. A boat comes by to rescue him, but he waves it away: “God will save me.”

A helicopter appears overhead, dropping a ladder. He waves it away: “God will save me.”

The water rises. He drowns. In heaven, he asks God, “Why didn’t You save me?”

God replies: “I sent you a boat and a helicopter. What more did you want?”

The swamp is where we finally stop waving away the rescue.

We stop insisting we can handle it ourselves. We stop waiting for some magical moment when we’ll suddenly have enough strength. We stop pretending the water isn’t rising.

We reach up. We grab the rope. We cry out: “Help.”

And here’s the mystery: the moment we stop trying to save ourselves is the moment rescue becomes possible.

You have to sink before you can learn to stand on something other than your own strength.

You have to admit you’re drowning before you can receive the life preserver.

You have to get honest about the swamp before you can find the path out of it.

This is the counterintuitive truth of Movement 1: 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/I-Will-Rise-Duet.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/But-then-I-Prayed-Female.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/STOP-a-Rap.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Dying-Changes-Everything.mp3)

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 these four chapters, take a moment to prepare yourself. This isn’t light reading. This is soul work.

**Where is your swamp?**

Not the metaphorical, theoretical swamp. Your actual swamp. The place where you’re stuck right now. The situation that’s draining you. The pattern you can’t break. The shame you can’t shake. The failure you can’t escape.

Name it. Be specific. Don’t soften it. Don’t spiritualize it yet.

This is…

**What are you afraid to admit?**

What truth have you been avoiding? What weakness have you been hiding? What need have you been denying?

If you could be completely honest—with yourself, with God, with one other person—what would you say?

Practice saying it out loud right now. Even if it’s just a whisper: “I’m not okay.”

**What would it cost you to get honest?**

Would you have to drop the mask? Disappoint someone? Admit you need help? Let go of control?

The swamp requires honesty. And honesty requires courage.

Are you ready?

**One more thing:**

You don’t have to be strong to enter the swamp. You just have to be honest.

You don’t have to have faith figured out. You just have to be willing to cry out.

You don’t have to know how this ends. You just have to take the next step.

So take a breath. Steady yourself. And step into the honesty that healing requires.

The swamp is waiting. But so is grace.

*When you’re ready, turn to Chapter 1: My Swamp.*

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/I-Will-Rise-Duet.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.com/8o4Etw



Scan to listen: I Will Rise

**Before you read this chapter, I want you to know something.**

If you’re still reading, you’re already curious. Maybe skeptical, but curious. That’s enough.

This chapter is going to talk about the swamp—that stuck place where you’ve been living, maybe for years. It’s going to name some hard truths. It’s going to introduce you to some people who’ve been there and some ancient wisdom that speaks to it.

And at the end, I’m going to ask you to consider something. Just consider it—not commit to it, not sign up for anything. Just open your mind to a possibility you might not have thought about before.

A possibility that the stirring you feel, the restlessness, the longing—might be more than random. Might be something, or Someone, calling to you.

You don’t have to believe it yet. You don’t have to understand it all. You just have to keep reading.

Can you do that?

**One more thing about the music.**

Maybe you’re not ready for it yet. I know it’s going to have a spiritual slant to it. But just start listening.

Because I think you’ll find much of it is a desperate plea for more than just my own limitations. It’s a plea for something greater.

And that something greater—I hope you’ll discover through this journey—is God’s love in a way you may have never considered.

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 |
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| ## Stories of the Swamp |
| Want to know something interesting? This swamp thing isn’t new. People have been stuck in swamps for thousands of years. And some of their stories might sound familiar. |
| **The Ancient Captives** |
| There’s a story about a group of people stuck for four hundred years. Generational swamp. They couldn’t free themselves. |
| So they groaned. They cried out. |
| And the response? |
| > “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians…” > > — Exodus 3:7-8 (NLT) |
| Not “try harder.” Not “fix yourself first.” |
| *I have come down to help them.* |
| **The Man in the Fish** |
| Then there’s this wild story about a guy in the ultimate swamp—literally inside a fish. |
| From that impossible place, he prays: |
| > “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!… Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God’s mercies. But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone.” > > — Jonah 2:2, 8-9 (NLT) |
| Even from inside a fish, he names what he’d been doing: “clinging to worthless idols.” |
| The swamp is where you discover that everything you’ve been clinging to is worthless. Every substitute. Every prop. Every false salvation. |
| **The Fugitive in the Cave** |
| And there’s the fugitive hiding in a cave, writing this: |
| > “I cry out to the LORD; I plead for the LORD’s mercy. I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles… I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me.” > > — Psalm 142:1-2, 4 (NLT) |
| He doesn’t clean up his prayer. Doesn’t spiritualize his pain. Doesn’t pretend. |
| That honesty—that raw vulnerability—IS courage. The complaint IS the prayer. |

## 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.

Maybe that’s you. I know it was me.

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

Not “clean up first.” Not “try harder.” Just come. As you are. Muck and all.

And I will give you rest.

|  |
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| ## 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. |
| The ancient poet modeled this vulnerability, written from a cave where he was hiding for his life. Brutally honest. Vulnerable. No pretending. No performance. He names isolation, abandonment, desperation. |
| The swamp forces vulnerability. You can’t maintain the image anymore. You can’t perform. You can’t pretend. |
| It feels like death. |
| But it’s actually courage. |
| This is how you become truly known. And only the truly known can be truly loved. |
| That admission—that raw honesty—isn’t defeat. |
| It’s the doorway. |

Sawgrass Lake Park, St. Petersburg, FL

| ## Song Integration |
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| ## 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. |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** I hear You calling through the night, A voice so strong, yet full of light. You pull me close, You draw me higher, Out of the swamp, into the fire. |
| **[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. |
| **[Verse 2]** I made a home in sinking ground, Afraid to leave, afraid to drown. But chains aren’t homes, and wounds don’t heal When I resist the love you reveal The fear, the shame, the weight I’ve known, You call me out, You lead me home. |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** I hear You calling through the night, A voice so strong, yet full of light. You pull me close, You draw me higher, Out of the swamp, into the fire. |
| **[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. |
| **[Bridge]** 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! |
| **[Final 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]** No turning back, I’m walking free, The past is gone, Your love in me. The past is gone, Your love in me. Oh, I will rise… I will rise. |

## 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 |
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| ## Practice: The Five-Minute Honest Conversation |
| Find a quiet space. Set a timer for five minutes. |
| And just be honest. Out loud if possible. In writing if necessary. In prayer if that’s your language. In conversation with yourself if not. |
| Don’t edit yourself. Don’t soften it. Don’t try to make it sound better. Just be honest. |
| Talk about the swamp. How long you’ve been there. What it feels like. What you’re angry about, confused about, afraid of. |
| Talk about the performance. The exhaustion. The isolation. The shame. |
| Say “Help.” |
| When the timer goes off, breathe. |
| *Take a breath.* |
| **Time needed:** 5 minutes |
| **Tip for starting small:** If 5 minutes of unfiltered honesty feels too long or overwhelming, start with just 2 minutes. Or if speaking out loud feels too vulnerable, write your honest thoughts in a journal instead. The goal is honesty, not eloquence or a specific format. Some people find it easier to be honest in writing first, then build up to speaking their truth aloud. |
| You’ve just spoken the most important truth: the real one. |
| The universe hears. Not because it was eloquent. Because it was true. And truth is the language healing speaks. |

## 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.

You’ve looked up.

For the first time in months—maybe years—you’ve stopped looking down at the muck, stopped looking around at the darkness, stopped looking inward at the failure.

You’ve looked up.

And you see something you haven’t seen in a long time: light. Just a glimmer. Just a hint. Filtering through the canopy. Weak, maybe. But real.

It’s not much. Not the blinding sunrise. Not the dramatic breakthrough. Just… a sliver. A crack in the darkness. Proof that somewhere beyond this place, light exists.

You can’t see the source yet. You can’t see the full picture. You can’t see the path out.

But you can see that the swamp isn’t all there is. There’s something beyond it. Above it. Outside it.

*Take a breath.*

For so long, you believed the swamp was your permanent address. That this stuck place, this numb place, this drowning place—this was it. This was all there was.

The light proves otherwise.

It doesn’t fix anything. Not yet. The muck is still thick. The water is still dark. You’re still sinking.

But the light changes the narrative.

Before: This is all there is. I’m stuck forever. There’s no way out.

Now: There’s something beyond this. Light exists. Maybe—just maybe—there’s a way.

And in that moment—that brief, fragile, barely-there moment—hope flickers.

Not rescue yet. Just realization.

*You can’t save yourself.*

And maybe—just maybe—that’s okay. Maybe admitting “I can’t” is the doorway to discovering “there is a way.”

You look up again. The light is still there. Faint but real.

And you whisper the only honest prayer left: “Help.”

It’s a beginning.

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/But-then-I-Prayed-Female.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.com/swI2s8



Scan to listen: But Then I Prayed

**An Invitation to Consider**

Before we dig into this chapter, I want you to consider something.

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.

I’m not asking you to believe everything right now. I’m not asking you to commit to a religion or join a church or sign a statement of faith.

I’m just asking you to consider: what if He’s there? What if He’s been there all along, waiting for you to turn toward Him?

You don’t need a huge performance prayer. No religious jargon. No fancy words.

Just a simple prayer. Something like this:

*“Yes, God. I want to listen to You. I want to consider what You may have to offer me from my swamp.”*

That’s it. That’s enough.

Because the God who created you doesn’t need your eloquence. He just wants your honesty.

He doesn’t need your strength. He just wants your willingness.

He doesn’t need your certainty. He just wants you to crack the door open and say, “I’m listening.”

What if that’s all it takes? What if the turning point—the “but then I prayed” moment—is simply saying yes to the possibility that Someone is calling your name?

Can you do that? Can you just consider it?

**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 |
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| ## Stories of Prayer |
| Throughout history, the most powerful prayers have come from the most desperate places. |
| **Moses in Crisis (Exodus 32:11-13, NLT)** |
| Moses is on the mountain receiving the Law—forty days and nights in God’s presence, tablets being written by the finger of God Himself. But down below, the people have grown impatient. They’ve melted their gold jewelry and cast an idol, a golden calf, and are dancing around it, worshiping it. |
| God sees it. And His anger burns hot. |
| “I have seen these people,” God tells Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.” |
| Moses is standing before the living God, hearing a divine sentence of destruction pronounced on an entire nation. The people he led out of Egypt. The people he’s been shepherding through the wilderness. They’re about to be annihilated. |
| This is the moment Moses could have stepped back, let God’s justice fall, maybe even started over with a new people descended from him alone. But instead, Moses steps forward. And he prays—not safe, not polished, not deferential. |
| He argues with God. Reminds God of His promises. Intercedes desperately: |
| > “But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. ‘O LORD!’ he said. ‘Why are you so angry with your own people, whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand?’” > > — Exodus 32:11 (NLT) |
| Moses prays honestly, boldly, desperately. He appeals to God’s reputation, God’s promises, God’s character. And incredibly—God listens. God relents. The prayer changes the outcome. |
| **The Tax Collector’s Prayer (Luke 18:13, NLT)** |
| Jesus tells a parable about two men who went up to the temple to pray. Picture the scene: the grand temple courts, people gathered for prayer, the religious elite visible and vocal. |
| The first man, a Pharisee, stands prominently where people can see him. His prayer is a performance: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” |
| Everything about his prayer screams confidence. He’s listing his resume. Comparing himself favorably to others. Standing tall. |
| The second man is a tax collector—a collaborator with Rome, a traitor to his own people, a man who’s gotten rich by exploiting others. He knows what people think of him. He knows what he thinks of himself. |
| He stands at a distance. Not up front. Not visible. Back in the shadows where people like him belong. |
| He can’t even lift his eyes to heaven. Head down. Shoulders slumped. And he beats his chest—an outward sign of inward anguish—as he prays the only prayer he has left: |
| > “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’” > > — Luke 18:13 (NLT) |
| No resume. No comparisons. No religious credentials. Just raw, desperate honesty: I’m a sinner. Have mercy. |
| Jesus’ verdict? The tax collector—the desperate one, the honest one, the one who brought nothing but need—went home justified. The Pharisee didn’t. |
| **Historical Prayers from the Swamp** |
| **Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)** spent years wrestling with his own brokenness—sexual addiction, intellectual pride, spiritual confusion. Even after his conversion, he looked at the wreckage of his inner life and knew he couldn’t fix it himself. So he prayed with brutal honesty: |
| > “The house of my soul is too narrow for you to come to it. May it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins: restore it.” |
| This is the prayer of someone who’s stopped pretending the house is in good shape. Someone who’s looked at the ruins and said: I can’t fix this. But maybe You can. |
| **Martin Luther (1483-1546)** battled depression so severe he sometimes couldn’t get out of bed. The spiritual anguish was crushing—doubts, despair, a sense of God’s absence. In one of his darkest moments, he wrote this prayer: |
| > “I am dust and ashes and full of sin… I have no other refuge or comfort than your dear Son Jesus Christ.” |
| Not theological precision. Not spiritual victory. Just desperate clinging to the only hope he had left: Jesus. |
| These weren’t prayers from mountaintops. They were prayers from swamps, prisons, depressions, doubts, and desperation. Prayers that brought the real mess, the actual ruins, the honest brokenness before God. |
| And every single one was heard. |

## 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.

Not because God suddenly started listening. He had been listening all along. But because I finally started being honest.

And honesty is the language of connection.

“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*

Reality doesn’t need our pretense. It already knows the truth. What it wants is for us to know it—and to speak it.

The swamp teaches us to reach out without pretense. To cry out without composing. To pour out our souls without editing.

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

Not the polished one. The real one.

| ## Song Integration |
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| ## 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. |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** And in my sorrow, in my despair, I found Your presence waiting there. |
| **[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. |
| **[Verse 2]** The storms rolled in, the waves were high, The questions burned, “Lord, why, oh why?” My strength was gone, my faith ran dry, Yet still I lifted up my cry. |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** And in the chaos, I heard You say, “My child, I’m here, don’t turn away.” |
| **[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. |
| **[Bridge]** 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. |
| **[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]** So I will pray through every fight, I’ll lift my song in darkest night. |

## 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 |
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| ## Practice: Simple Prayer |
| Richard Foster calls it “Simple Prayer”—bringing your ordinary concerns to a loving presence without facade, without pretending to be holy, without concealing true feelings. |
| Here’s how to practice it this week: |
| **Daily (5-10 minutes):** |
| Each morning or evening, sit in a quiet place. No special posture required. No religious language necessary. Just you and honesty. |
| Say out loud (or write down) these three things: |
| 1. **“This is where I am…”** - Name your actual state. Not where you should be. Where you ARE. - *“I’m exhausted.”* - *“I’m angry at You.”* - *“I don’t know if I believe anymore.”* - *“I’m terrified about [specific thing].”* - *“I feel nothing.”* |
| 2. **“This is what I need…”** - Ask honestly. No spiritualizing. What do you actually need? - *“I need this situation to change.”* - *“I need to feel something besides numb.”* - *“I need help with my daughter.”* - *“I need to know You’re real.”* - *“I need rest.”* |
| 3. **“I’m willing to…”** - What are you willing to do? Even if it’s small. - *“I’m willing to show up tomorrow and try again.”* - *“I’m willing to be honest instead of hiding.”* - *“I’m willing to ask for help.”* - *“I’m willing to keep talking to You even though I’m angry.”* - *“I’m willing to trust You with this one thing.”* |
| That’s it. No closing formula required. No “amen” if it doesn’t feel right. Just honest conversation. |
| **This Week:** |
| Try this practice for 7 days. Keep it simple. Keep it honest. Don’t perform. Don’t pretend. |
| At the end of the week, notice: - Did anything shift? - Did honesty feel different from religious performance? - Did you sense anything—even faintly—listening? |
| Remember: You’re not trying to pray “correctly.” You’re learning to bring your real self instead of your edited self. That’s swamp prayer. And it’s the kind that gets heard. |

## 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.

You expected thunder. You expected lightning. You expected a dramatic rescue with angels and trumpets and immediate deliverance.

Instead, you got this: a quiet knowing. A gentle pressure on your shoulder. A whisper in the chaos that says, *“I see you. I’m here.”*

Not what you asked for. But somehow—impossibly—exactly what you needed.

*Take a breath.*

You’re still stuck. Still covered in muck. Still can’t see the way out.

But you’re not alone anymore. And that changes the mathematics of the swamp.

Before, it was: you versus the muck, you versus the darkness, you versus the despair. A losing battle. An impossible fight.

Now it’s different. Now there’s Presence. Now there’s Someone in the swamp with you. Not pulling you out yet. Not fixing it yet. Just… there. Steady. Holding. Present.

So you whisper it again, this time not with resignation but surrender: “Help me.”

And the help is already there. Not in the form you expected. Not on your timeline. But present. Real. Holding you even as you sink.

Because that’s what love does. Doesn’t wait for us to get it together. Meets us in the falling apart.

You’re still in the swamp.

But now you’re not alone in it.

And somehow—impossibly—that changes everything.

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/STOP-a-Rap.mp3)

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



Scan to listen: STOP!! And Make a Decision

**An Invitation to Consider**

You’ve named the swamp. You’ve considered that God might be calling.

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

But now comes the harder part. The decision part.

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.”*

That’s enough. That’s honest. That’s real.

You don’t have to have it all figured out. You don’t have to believe everything perfectly. You just have to be willing to take the next step.

To pray—even if it’s just “Help.”

To listen—even if you’re not sure you’ll hear anything.

To decide—to continue this journey of discovery, wherever it leads.

Can you accept the possibility that God can help you even in your unbelief? That He can lead you out of the swamp even when you’re not sure He’s real?

Because here’s the truth: He doesn’t need your certainty. He just needs your willingness to take one step.

Keep reading. And be ready to decide.

**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.

Choose. This day. How you will live.

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 |
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| ## Stories of Decision |
| Throughout history, the crossroads moment has defined destinies. Not the gradual drift, but the crisis decision—the moment someone stopped, turned, and chose a different path. |
| **Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3-4)** |
| Moses had been running for 40 years. Hiding in the wilderness. Tending sheep. Trying to forget who he was and what he’d done. The swamp of shame and exile had become comfortable—or at least familiar. |
| Then came the burning bush. The voice calling his name. The impossible assignment: “Go back. Confront Pharaoh. Lead my people out.” |
| Moses argued. Made excuses. Tried every angle to avoid the decision: - “Who am I to do this?” - “What if they don’t believe me?” - “I’m not eloquent enough.” - “Please send someone else.” |
| But finally, he made the choice. Not because he felt ready. Not because he had it all figured out. He chose because the burning bush wouldn’t let him stay in the wilderness. |
| He turned from the swamp of hiding toward the terrifying path of calling. |
| **The Prodigal Son’s Turning Point (Luke 15:17-20)** |
| > “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you.”’” > > — Luke 15:17-18 (NLT) |
| Three decisive phrases: 1. **“When he finally came to his senses”** - Reality broke through. The illusion shattered. He saw the swamp for what it was. 2. **“I will go home to my father”** - Not “I should.” Not “someday I might.” I WILL GO. 3. **“So he returned home to his father”** - The decision became action. He didn’t wait until he felt worthy or had the perfect speech. He moved. |
| The turning point wasn’t gradual awakening. It was a crisis moment in a pigpen when starvation and desperation finally overpowered pride and shame. |
| **Peter’s Denial and Restoration (John 21:15-17)** |
| After betraying Jesus three times, Peter went back to fishing. Back to the old life. The swamp of failure and shame. |
| Then Jesus showed up on the beach. Asked Peter three times: “Do you love me?” |
| Each time, Peter had to choose: Will I defend myself? Will I run? Or will I answer honestly? |
| > “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.” > > — John 21:17 (NLT) |
| That vulnerable admission—“You know everything about me, including my failure, and I still love you”—was the crossroads. Peter chose honesty over hiding. Restoration over resignation. Forward over back. |
| Jesus’ response: “Feed my sheep.” Not “Earn your way back.” Not “Prove yourself first.” Just: You’ve chosen truth. Now live your calling. |
| **The Rich Young Ruler’s Missed Crossroads (Mark 10:17-22)** |
| Not every story ends with the right choice. |
| A wealthy young man ran up to Jesus, desperate: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” |
| Jesus gave him the path forward: “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” |
| > “At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” > > — Mark 10:22 (NLT) |
| He stood at the crossroads. He saw the choice clearly. But he couldn’t let go of the swamp—his wealth, his security, his identity—even though it was killing him spiritually. |
| He walked away sad. Not because he didn’t know the answer. Because he knew it and still chose the swamp. |
| This is the tragedy: You can see the path and still refuse to walk it. |
| **Martin Luther’s Crisis Decision (1517)** |
| Martin Luther, a Catholic monk and professor, was drowning in religious performance. Trying to earn salvation through endless confession, self-punishment, spiritual disciplines. The swamp of “never enough.” |
| Then he rediscovered grace in scripture: “The righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:17). |
| On October 31, 1517, he nailed 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg—challenging the entire religious system he’d devoted his life to. |
| When summoned to recant before the Diet of Worms, he faced the ultimate crossroads: Safety or truth? The approval of the church or the freedom of conscience? |
| His answer: “Here I stand. I can do no other.” |
| That decision cost him everything—security, reputation, even his life was threatened. But it sparked a Reformation that changed the world. |
| Because one man stopped, looked at the crossroads, and chose truth over comfort. |
| **Corrie ten Boom’s Wartime Choice (1940s)** |
| Corrie ten Boom and her family were comfortable watchmakers in Holland. When the Nazis invaded, they faced a choice: Stay safe and silent, or risk everything to hide Jews. |
| They chose to act. Transformed their home into a hiding place. Saved an estimated 800 lives. |
| Eventually they were betrayed, arrested, sent to concentration camps. Corrie’s father died after 10 days. Her sister Betsie died at Ravensbrück. |
| But before she died, Betsie told Corrie: |
| > “We must tell people what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.” > > — Betsie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* |
| After the war, Corrie could have chosen bitterness. Hiding. Safety. But she chose to travel the world sharing forgiveness—even forgiving a guard from Ravensbrück who approached her after a speaking event. |
| The crossroads didn’t end with her wartime decision. Every day after, she had to choose again: bitterness or forgiveness, hiding or witness, safety or mission. |
| **The Pattern of Decision** |
| Notice what these stories have in common: |
| 1. **Crisis precipitates clarity** - The burning bush. The pigpen. The beach confrontation. The church door. The Nazi invasion. Crisis forces the decision. |
| 2. **The choice is binary** - There’s no middle ground. Moses couldn’t half-confront Pharaoh. Peter couldn’t partially confess his love. Luther couldn’t somewhat stand. The decision is all or nothing. |
| 3. **Fear doesn’t disqualify you** - Every person was terrified. Moses argued. The prodigal rehearsed his speech. Peter knew his own failure. Luther faced death threats. Fear is normal. Paralysis is optional. |
| 4. **The decision precedes the feeling** - No one felt ready. No one waited for courage. They chose, then moved, then the courage followed. |
| 5. **Inaction is a choice** - The rich young ruler didn’t make a “wrong” choice. He made no choice—which was choosing the swamp by default. |
| You’re standing at your own crossroads. The pattern is the same. The question is the same. |
| 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.

That’s the brutal honesty this chapter ponders: you’re not a victim of the swamp. You’re its tenant. And eviction requires your signature.

Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz, wrote:

“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*

That space—that moment between the swamp and the decision—that’s where freedom lives.

You can’t control what happened to you. Can’t control the circumstances that led to the swamp. Can’t control other people’s choices that contributed to your pain.

But you can control what you do next.

That’s your power. That’s your freedom.

And no one—not your past, not your circumstances, not your fears—can take that from you.

| ## Song Integration |
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| ## Lyrics: Stop/Decide (The Rap) |
| **(Intro)** Yo, I’m trapped in the noise, I’m lost in my mind, Skeletons creeping, they’re crossing the line. Doubts keep spinning, I’m running in place, But I hear Your voice calling, cutting through the haze. |
| **(Verse 1)** I can’t fake it, no, I can’t shake it, The pain in my chest, I just can’t take it. Voices screaming, got me stuck in my head, Skeletons dancing where the angels once tread. |
| What’s sleek? What’s weak? Who’s real? Who’s fake? I’m drowning in the questions I can’t seem to shake. I’m shouting to the sky, “God, show me the way, I’m tired of the chaos; I’m begging You today.” |
| **(Hook)** STOP! Gotta make a decision, Your voice breaks through with a crystal vision. The fear fades out, now I see You’re near, All I gotta do is turn and let You steer. |
| **(Verse 2)** You said, “Lay it down, I’ll carry the weight, Let Me take your struggle, it’s never too late.” Step by step, yeah, I’m walking the light, The chains fall off as I step in the fight. |
| The lies I believed, now they crumble and fall, Your love lifts me higher, breaking through it all. I was lost in my shame, but You called my name, Now I’m running toward You, never the same. |
| **(Hook)** STOP! Gotta make a decision, Your voice breaks through with a crystal vision. The fear fades out, now I see You’re near, All I gotta do is turn and let You steer. |
| **(Bridge)** Grace, grace, it’s greater than sin, It pulls me from the darkness I was living within. Hell on Earth? That’s the weight of my shame, But Heaven is Your love, now I’m praising Your name. |
| You whispered to me, “Give me your pain, I’ll take what’s broken and make you whole again.” Eternal peace, yeah, it’s all that I need, So I follow Your voice, let it take the lead. |
| **(Chorus)** Grace, grace, God’s grace, Pulling me out of my darkest place. Grace, grace, it’s a holy embrace, Now I’m running with Your love, set a brand-new pace. |
| **(Outro)** So I STOP, and I make the decision, To follow Your path, walk the perfect vision. The shame is gone, my heart feels new, I’m stepping in faith, God, I’m trusting in You. |

## 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 |
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| ## Practice: The Line in the Sand |
| Find a quiet space. Grab a piece of paper. |
| Draw a line down the middle. |
| On the left side, write: **SWAMP** |
| On the right side, write: **WATER** |
| Under “Swamp,” list what staying looks like. What you’ll keep doing. What you’ll keep feeling. Where you’ll be in a year if nothing changes. |
| Under “Water,” list what leaving looks like. What you’ll have to risk. What you’ll have to let go of. What might be possible if you trust. |
| Look at both columns. |
| Really look. |
| Now make a choice. |
| Circle one. Not the one that feels safest. Not the one that requires less. The one that’s TRUE. |
| Then take one action—today—that moves you toward what you circled. |
| One action. Not ten. Just one. |
| Move. |

## Closing Image

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

The swamp is behind you. Familiar. Known. Safe in its misery.

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

And you stand at the crossroads.

This is the moment where everything pivots. Not when you arrive at the destination. Not when the transformation is complete. Right here. In the choosing.

For a moment, everything is suspended. You could go back. You could change your mind. You could tell yourself “maybe later” or “not yet” or “I’m not ready.”

The swamp whispers its temptations: *At least you know what to expect here. At least you’ve learned to survive. At least it’s familiar.*

The water whispers its invitation: *There’s cleansing here. There’s life here. There’s something more than survival.*

And you—you’re caught between comfort and calling.

But you don’t go back.

You take a breath. You feel your heart pounding. You acknowledge the fear—real fear, legitimate fear—and you choose anyway.

*Take a breath.*

And then: movement.

One foot forward. Then the other.

Not running. Not confident. Not sure this is the right choice. Just moving.

Toward the water.

You’ve chosen. And now you walk.

Each step is a decision. Each step is an act of trust. Each step says: *I believe there’s something better than where I’ve been, even if I can’t yet see where I’m going.*

The swamp is behind you. The water’s edge is ahead.

And you—with trembling legs and racing heart and a courage you didn’t know you possessed—you’re a wayfarer now.

Not because you’re fearless.

Because you moved anyway.

Move.

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Dying-Changes-Everything.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.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.

Those have to go.

And that feels terrifying. It feels like loss. Like defeat. Like the end.

But what if it’s not the end? What if it’s the beginning?

This chapter is about death—but not the kind you need fear, though it might be difficult. It’s about the death that leads to life. The kind of dying that makes space for something new to grow.

I’m not going to sugarcoat it: this part is hard. Really hard.

But I want you to know something before you read further: on the other side of this death is resurrection. On the other side of letting go is freedom. On the other side of the tomb is new life.

You don’t have to understand it all right now. You just have to keep reading. Keep walking. Keep trusting that the path leads somewhere good.

Can you do that?

Before we go further, let’s pray together. A simple prayer, but an honest one—for the journey that may come.

*“God, I’m scared of what has to die in me. I’m scared of letting go. But I’m also tired of living the way I’ve been living. If there’s new life on the other side of this death, I want it. Help me trust You through this. Help me let go of what needs to go. Help me believe that You’re leading me somewhere good. I’m willing to keep walking, even when I don’t understand. Amen.”*

Someone once said: “Almost dying changes little. Dying changes everything.”

You can come close to the edge, peek over, and walk back unchanged. You can almost hit bottom and still cling to the old life. Almost-dying gives you a scare, maybe a wake-up call. But it doesn’t transform you.

Dying does.

I’m not talking about biological death. I’m talking about the psychological, spiritual deaths we must undergo if we’re going to truly live. The deaths that happen daily—to old patterns, false selves, broken ways of being.

Because here’s what they don’t tell you when you first commit to change: that initial decision wasn’t the end of dying. It was the beginning.

Maybe you committed your life to God years ago—as a teenager, a young adult, or maybe you were even baptized as an infant. That baptism symbolized death, burial, and resurrection. That moment was real. That commitment mattered.

But I’m not talking about that decision right now.

I’m talking about the death that needs to happen today. The swamp you’re in now has nothing to do with who you were when you first believed (if that situation fits you). That person was sincere. That person meant every word. But there’s a reason you picked up this book now and are reading it.

Life happened. Pain accumulated. False selves formed to protect you. Old patterns crept back in. And the death that needs to happen now is different from the transformation you imagined back then. This is a new death—not of your initial faith (if that’s you), but of everything that’s grown up around it. Everything that’s keeping you stuck.

There’s a moment in every healing journey when you realize: something has to die.

Maybe it’s a relationship that’s turned 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 understanding of reality—the tame, manageable version you created to feel safe.

Something has to die. And you know it.

Death feels like defeat. Failure. The end.

But what if death is the beginning?

The writing that follows came from my two deaths—once to my old self, once to my illusions about how life works. Both felt like endings. Both turned out to be grace.

Before resurrection, there must be a tomb.

| ## Key Themes |
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| ## Stories of Death and Transformation |
| **The Phoenix Process:** |
| Elizabeth Lesser, in *Broken Open: How Difficult Times Can Help Us Grow*, calls this “the phoenix process”—the experience of going through fire and being transformed. |
| If you’re in a spiritual crash, you have to decide whether to resist it or surrender to it. This is the holy ground of transformation—the dark, messy, terrifying part of the journey where you let the old you die so the new you can be born. |
| The spiritual crash. That’s what the swamp is. That’s what brought you to this chapter. |
| And Lesser says you have a choice: resist or surrender. |
| Resisting looks like staying busy, staying numb, staying in control. Pretending the crash isn’t happening. White-knuckling your way through. |
| Surrendering looks like admitting: “I can’t hold this together anymore. Something has to change. Something has to die.” |
| The holy ground of transformation is dark. Messy. Terrifying. |
| But it’s also where the new you is born. |
| **Jesus in Gethsemane:** |
| It’s night. The Passover meal is finished. Jesus leads His disciples to an olive grove called Gethsemane—a familiar place, a place He’s gone before to pray. But tonight is different. Tonight, the weight of what’s coming presses down on Him with crushing force. |
| He takes Peter, James, and John a little farther into the garden. And then He tells them something He’s never said before: “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death.” |
| Not “I’m concerned about tomorrow.” Not “This will be difficult.” Soul-crushed. To the point of death. |
| He leaves them and goes a little farther—alone now—and falls face-down on the ground. In one of the most honest moments in all of spiritual literature, Jesus prays with brutal vulnerability: |
| > “He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, ‘My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.’” > > — Matthew 26:39 (NLT) |
| This is crucial: Jesus didn’t want to die. He didn’t spiritualize it. Didn’t pretend it was noble or easy. He asked for another way—desperately, repeatedly. Luke says His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. The anguish was so intense it manifested physically. |
| “If it is possible… take this cup away.” |
| He’s begging for escape. For a different plan. For relief from what He knows is coming: betrayal, abandonment, torture, the cross. And beyond the physical suffering—the spiritual horror of bearing the full weight of humanity’s sin, of being separated from the Father. |
| But then, in the midst of that crushing anguish: “Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” |
| That’s the death that changes everything. Not the death on the cross—that comes later. This is the death in the garden. The death of His will. His preference. His desire to avoid pain. Surrendered to a larger reality, a deeper trust. |
| And because He died that death in the garden before He died the death on the cross, resurrection was possible. |
| **Paul’s Daily Death:** |
| Paul, in his letters, talks about dying constantly. |
| > “And as for me, why would I risk my life hour by hour? For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you.” > > — 1 Corinthians 15:31 (NLT) |
| Every day, a death to self. Every day, a surrender. |
| > “My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” > > — Galatians 2:20 (NLT) |
| The old Paul is dead. Saul, the persecutor, is gone. A new creation lives. |
| > “I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.” > > — Philippians 3:7-8 (NLT) |
| Paul had to die to: - His reputation (from respected religious leader to rejected outcast) - His certainties (all his theological training had to be reconsidered) - His control (shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned) - His plans (wanted to go to Spain, ended up in Rome—in chains) |
| But every death brought resurrection. Every loss brought gain. Every tomb preceded new life. |
| **Choosing Vulnerability:** |
| Brené Brown speaks to what it means to truly be seen: |
| > “We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.” > > — Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection* |
| This is another kind of death—the death of hiding. The death of presenting only our curated, acceptable selves. The death of the armor we’ve worn to keep people at a safe distance. |
| Dying to the false self means letting ourselves be deeply seen and known. Not just our strengths, but our vulnerabilities. Not just our successes, but our failures. Not just who we wish we were, but who we actually are. |
| This terrifies us. Because what if we’re seen and rejected? What if we’re known and found wanting? |
| But Brown reveals the truth: love grows from the offering of our vulnerable, powerful selves. The very thing we’re afraid will cost us love is actually what cultivates it. |
| What if the very thing you’re most afraid to look at is exactly what needs to die so you can truly live? |

## 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 baptism, in therapy, in recovery, in spiritual awakening—all of these point to an ongoing reality we live out across our entire lives.

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 |
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| ## 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. |
| The opening verse—*“I’m sinking deep, the waters rising, lost inside this broken place”*—evokes baptismal theology. Romans 6:3-4 teaches that baptism represents being buried with Christ in death so we might rise with Him in new life. The waters that feel like drowning are actually the waters of transformation. They close over the old self completely, suffocating what was, creating space for what will be. “Drowning in my own disgrace” names the spiritual reality precipitating this death—not some abstract false self but the actual mess we’ve made, the patterns we’ve established, the shame we’ve accumulated. But the whisper—*“Child, you will be found”*—reveals this as mercy. God enters the waters with us, guides us through the death, promises discovery on the other side. |
| The theological tension is profound: we must go under completely (full immersion, total death) while trusting Love will not let us stay under (resurrection is promised). We want to keep one foot on solid ground, one part protected from dying. But the song insists: complete submersion or no transformation. |
| The chorus continues: *“I release the chains I’m clutching, now I rise on healing’s wings.”* This sequence matters theologically. Release precedes rising. We don’t rise by our own power; we rise because we’ve finally stopped clutching the chains anchoring us to the swamp, to the false self. The chains we clutch are paradoxically both bondage and false security—familiar even as they kill us. The chapter teaches through Richard Rohr that transformation happens through subtraction, not addition. The song embodies this: “I release” is the action required of us. “Now I rise” is what grace does in response. “Spirit lifts me from the waters, breath of heaven fills my lungs” invokes Genesis 2:7—new creation theology. We’re not being resuscitated to our old life but breathed into existence as new creations. |
| Verse two—*“The veil is torn, the light is breaking”*—references Jesus’ death when the temple veil tore (Matthew 27:51), symbolizing direct access to God’s presence. In our death to self, the veil between false identity and true identity is torn. “Flames of mercy burn around me” connects to the refiner’s fire from Malachi 3:2-3—not punishment but purification, burning away what is false while preserving what is true. |
| “No more running, no more hiding, I am free, I’m found again” speaks to the death of the impostor. The false self runs and hides, maintains performance, protects the image. But in complete death, this exhausting pattern finally ends. We stop running because there’s nothing left to protect. We stop hiding because we’ve been fully seen and are still loved. |
| 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 |
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| ## Practice: The Burial Ritual |
| Find a quiet place. Somewhere you can be honest. Somewhere you can grieve. |
| Bring something that represents what needs to die. Maybe: - An old journal from a season you’re releasing - A symbol of a role you’ve outgrown - A picture of a dream you’re surrendering - An object that represents the false self you’ve been performing |
| Hold it. Look at it. Acknowledge it. |
| Thank reality for it, even. For what it was. For what it taught you. For how it protected you when you needed protection. |
| Then say out loud: |
| **“I’m letting this die. I’m releasing it. I’m surrendering it to what’s Real.”** |
| Pause. Breathe. Let yourself feel the weight of it. |
| Then speak this burial prayer: |
| **“I surrender this. I let it die. I trust reality to transform what’s meant to live and to bury what’s meant to stay dead. I trust that Saturday doesn’t last forever. I trust that life is making all things new. Amen.”** |
| If possible, literally bury the object. Or put it away somewhere you won’t see it—a box in the closet, a drawer you don’t open. A physical act of release. |
| You’ve named the death. You’ve released it. Now you wait. In the tomb. On Saturday. |
| But you’re not alone. And Sunday is coming. |

## Closing Image

The tomb. Silent. Dark. Waiting.

Saturday—the day between death and resurrection. The most honest place to be.

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

And now you’re here. In the dark. In the silence. In the waiting.

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

But here’s what the tomb teaches: Death is not the end. It’s passage.

There’s a story of someone spending Saturday in the grave. Silent. Still. Hidden.

Those who loved him spent Saturday in despair, thinking it was over. Thinking Friday’s death was final.

They didn’t know Sunday was coming. They couldn’t see resurrection from inside Saturday.

Neither can you.

But it’s coming anyway.

The tomb is dark, but it’s not empty. Love is there. In the silence. In the waiting. In the dying.

And love is the force that raises the dead.

So you wait. You grieve. You trust.

This is not passivity. This is not giving up. This is the hardest work there is—letting go of what you desperately wanted to keep, releasing what you thought defined you, surrendering control over outcomes you can’t control anyway.

*Take a breath.*

You let what needs to die stay dead.

No resuscitation of the old self. No resurrection of the false identity. No revival of the patterns that brought you to the swamp in the first place.

Dead stays dead.

But death is not the last word.

And you keep your face turned toward Sunday—toward transformation you can’t yet see but believe is coming anyway.

Saturday is dark. Saturday is silent. Saturday is waiting.

But Saturday is not forever.

Because dying changes everything.

And Sunday always comes.

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Miracle.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Shadow-of-Your-Grace-Duet.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Amazing-Grace-Male-2.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Dig-a-Little-Deeper.mp3)

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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Miracle.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.com/nXiDRV



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.

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| ## 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.” |
| The scandal of grace is that it’s free. Completely free. You can’t earn it, buy it, or deserve it. You can only receive it. |
| 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. |
| It sounds like a cliche, but it’s true: Grace meets you exactly where you are. But it loves you too much to leave you there. |
| **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. |
| It says: “Stop trying. Start receiving. You can’t fix this. But I can. Let Me.” |
| **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 H₂O. 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.

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| ## 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 |
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| ## The Wayfarer Moment |
| **You don’t clean yourself up before you come to the water. You come to the water to be cleaned.** |
| 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 grace washes you. |
| For months—maybe years, if I’m honest—I’d been wrestling with unworthiness. Watching other people experience breakthrough, healing, transformation. Hearing their testimonies of miracles. Witnessing the joy that comes when someone is made whole. |
| And feeling… nothing. Except the growing conviction that miracles were for other people. Not for me. |
| I felt like a lost cause. Weighed down by shame so heavy I could barely breathe. I was angry at God. I shouted at Him in the darkness: “Why not me, Lord? Why am I not deserving? If You were truly a God of love and compassion, You are the one I would be serving. But You’re not showing up for me.” |
| I walked away that night. Heart hardened. Or so I told myself. |
| 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 turning point came in April 2014. I flew to Oklahoma City to visit my best friend. That night, I went to watch the Thunder play the Spurs—trying to escape, to forget about my miserable lot in life, to flee from how I’d destroyed my family and marriage. |
| But you know what they say: The only problem with running is that everywhere you go, you’re there. |
| 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. |
| *Oklahoma City, Lake Hefner* |
| I found myself at Lake Hefner in North Oklahoma City, sitting at the end of a boat ramp. Figuratively, it looked like my life: the end of the road. |
| What would I do? |
| I walked to the end of the boat ramp. Sat down. Contemplated my situation. Still wearing my mask. Still pretending I had it together. Still performing rather than being real. |
| How do you break free from yourself? From the bondage that keeps you enslaved to shame and performance and the need to look good? |
| 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. |
| *I’m finding myself at a loss for words* *And the funny thing is it’s okay* *The last thing I need is to be heard* *But to hear what You would say* |
| *Word of God speak* *Would You pour down like rain* *Washing my eyes to see* *Your majesty* *To be still and know* *That You’re in this place* *Please let me stay and rest* *In Your holiness* *Word of God speak* |
| What happened next? I guess I’ll just say: I received my miracle. |
| I stepped off the end of the road and started walking toward the water. With each step, I asked the Holy Spirit to embrace me. Asked God to give me a much-needed miracle in my life. |
| I put my feet into the water. The Living Water’s Edge. |
| And I was comforted in knowing: it’s going to be okay. |
| The water didn’t recoil from my shame. It didn’t reject the mess I’d made. It received me. Cool, real, life-giving. |
| That’s grace. Not the reward for cleaning up. The power that cleanses. |
| 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. |
| The writing that follows came from that day. The song came later, as these raw confessions transformed into declaration. The writing asks questions: Have you ever wanted a miracle? Have you ever seen one? The song answers: Come to the living water’s edge. The miracle is available. You can be made whole. |
| The writing is the struggle. The song is the musical translation. |

## 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.

The opening verse asks: “Have you longed for a miracle, felt unworthy to believe?” This is the honest cry of someone who’s watched God move in other lives while convinced they’re somehow disqualified. But then the verse pivots with devastating grace: “Jesus stands with arms wide open, He’s the Savior of your soul.” Not “Jesus will open His arms once you prove yourself.” Jesus *stands*—present tense, already positioned—with arms *wide open*. The posture precedes the person’s arrival. The welcome exists before the worthiness.

This echoes the father in Luke 15 who sees the prodigal “while he was still a long way off” and runs to him. Grace doesn’t wait at the finish line. Grace runs toward us while we’re still covered in pig slop, still rehearsing apologies, still convinced we’ll be lucky to be hired as servants.

Verse two shifts to testimony: “Have you seen a heart surrendered, healed by mercy’s gentle hand?” Mercy’s hand is *gentle*—crucial because those who’ve lived with shame expect punishment. They brace for the blow. But mercy is gentle precisely because it knows how fragile the shame-bearer is. “Bring your pain and all your burdens; leave them at the cross tonight.” The invitation is comprehensive—not “bring your acceptable struggles” but “all your burdens.” And the timing—“tonight”—creates urgency through availability. Why wait? Why carry it another day?

“Let His power make you righteous, shining pure in holy light.” This is imputed righteousness—we’re made right not through our effort but through Christ’s finished work. The agency belongs to God. Our part is reception, not production.

The chorus declares: “Come and drink the living water, let it wash your fear away.” This references John 7:37-38—Jesus’s invitation to the thirsty. Notice what the water washes away: fear. Not just guilt, but the fear underneath—fear of rejection, exposure, fear that we’re unlovable at the core. “Jesus breaks the chains that bind you; He’s your miracle today.” Not “might break” or “will consider.” He *breaks* them. Present tense. And He’s your miracle *today*—not someday, not after you’ve earned it. Today.

The bridge intensifies the desperation: “Have you felt the weight of sorrow, like a chain you cannot break?” This is learned helplessness—you’ve tried so many times to change that you’ve given up trying. But into this darkness: “Jesus sees your every struggle, and He whispers, ‘You are Mine.’” Not “You’ll be Mine if you fix yourself.” *You are Mine.* Present possession. The claim precedes the change.

“Through His grace, the chains will shatter; you will rise in love divine.” The chains don’t gradually loosen—they *shatter*. Complete break. Total freedom. “Lift your hands and call upon Him; He will meet you where you stand.” Romans 10:13—no prerequisites, no qualifications. Just call. And He meets you *where you stand*—in the mess, at the dead end, covered in shame.

This song became my declaration that I was wrong about grace. Grace *is* for me. Miracles *are* for me. Not because I earned them, but because Jesus stands with arms wide open and says, “You are Mine.” Worthiness isn’t the prerequisite. Thirst is. The living water’s edge isn’t for the worthy. It’s for the thirsty. The miracle isn’t that the water changes you before you enter—the miracle is that the water receives you exactly as you are, and *then* begins the transformation from the inside out.

| ## Lyrics: Living Water’s Edge |
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| ## 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.

1. **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?

1. **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.

1. **What would it mean to stop trying to clean yourself up and just come to the water?**

* What would change if you stopped performing? Stopped trying to earn grace? Stopped waiting to be good enough? What if you came as you are—right now, in this moment, with all your mess—and let grace wash you?

| ## Practice: The Water Ritual |
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| ## 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. |
| You look at your hands. Still muddy. But less than before. |
| You cup water and pour it over your arms. Watch the mud run off in brown streams. Underneath: skin. Your actual skin. You’d almost forgotten what it looked like. |
| You’re still a mess. You’re still covered in swamp. But you’re also being washed. Both are true at the same time. |
| *Take a breath.* |
| This is the water’s edge. Not instant transformation. The beginning of transformation. Not immediate perfection. The start of healing. |
| You take another step. The water rises to your knees. Colder. Stronger current. But also… invigorating. Alive. |
| You’re wading in. One step at a time. Letting the water do what you could never do for yourself. |
| And somewhere deep inside, beneath the shame and the fear and the exhaustion, something stirs. Something that feels almost like… hope. |
| Not the fragile, easily crushed hope you’ve known before. But something sturdier. Something rooted not in your ability to clean yourself up, but in the water’s ability to wash you. |
| Living water. |
| You’re at the water’s edge. And you’re wading in. And it’s the beginning of everything. |

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Shadow-of-Your-Grace-Duet.mp3)

**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 |
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| ## Stories of Shadow |
| **Want to hear some ancient stories about this kind of shelter?** |
| **Ruth Under Boaz’s Wing (Ruth 2:12)** |
| Picture Ruth in the harvest fields of Bethlehem. She’s a Moabite widow in a foreign land—no husband, no security, no legal protection. Jewish law allows the poor to glean—to follow behind the harvesters and gather whatever grain they drop or leave behind. It’s backbreaking work, hot and humiliating, and you’re completely at the mercy of the field owner’s generosity. |
| Ruth bends and gathers, bends and gathers, working from sunrise in fields that aren’t hers, gleaning scraps to keep herself and her mother-in-law Naomi from starving. She’s vulnerable. Exposed. A foreign woman alone among men who could exploit her or drive her away. |
| Then Boaz, the field owner, notices her. He asks who she is. And when he learns she’s the Moabite woman who left everything—her homeland, her people, her gods—to follow Naomi and Naomi’s God, he speaks a blessing over her that captures the heart of shadow grace: |
| > “May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done.” > > — Ruth 2:12 (NLT) |
| Ruth had left everything to come under the wing-shadow of Yahweh. She sought shelter in the God of Israel even though she had no guarantee He would provide. She was vulnerable, at risk, exposed—but she came under His wings. |
| And what happens? God provides through Boaz. Protects her from harm. Covers her in the harvest field. Redeems her story completely—she marries Boaz, bears a son named Obed, and becomes part of the lineage of King David and Jesus Himself. |
| Shadow grace doesn’t promise comfort or ease. But it promises covering. And under that covering, redemption happens. |
| **Israelites Under the Cloud (Exodus 13:21-22)** |
| When God led Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, He didn’t remove the wilderness. The desert was still scorching hot by day, the sun beating down on sand and rock with no trees for shelter, no streams for relief. At night, the temperature plummeted—bitter cold under a vast sky of stars. |
| But God didn’t leave them exposed. He accompanied them: |
| > “By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” > > — Exodus 13:21-22 |
| Imagine waking up in the desert camp, the sun just rising, heat already building. You look ahead and there it is—the cloud. Massive. Moving slowly in front of the camp. Leading. And as you walk behind it, you notice: it’s not just showing direction. It’s providing shade. Shadow. Covering from the relentless sun. |
| The cloud wasn’t just navigation—it was mercy. Protection. Visible, tangible proof that God was present, leading, sheltering. In the scorching wilderness, that shadow meant the difference between survival and death. |
| At night, the cloud transformed into fire—warmth in the cold, light in the darkness, constant reminder that they weren’t alone. |
| God didn’t teleport them to the promised land. He walked them through the wilderness, step by step, mile by mile. But He never left them exposed. The shadow of His presence covered them every single day of the journey. |
| **Jesus’ Lament Over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37)** |
| Perhaps the most heartbreaking image of shadow grace comes from Jesus Himself: |
| > “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather you together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” > > — Matthew 23:37 |
| The tender image: a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. When danger comes, the mother hen doesn’t run. She spreads her wings and calls her chicks to safety beneath her. She covers them with her own body, willing to take the blow herself to protect them. |
| This is the heart of God. Longing to gather us. Aching to cover us. Willing to take the wounds so we can be sheltered. |
| But—and here’s the tragedy—we have to be willing. We have to come. We have to run to the shelter instead of away from it. |
| The shadow is there. The wings are spread. The invitation is given. Will we come? |
| **Deep Dive: Psalm 91** |
| We’ve touched on this psalm, but it deserves deeper exploration. Psalm 91 is the ultimate shadow-grace text: |
| > “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty… He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.” > > — Psalm 91:1, 4-6 |
| Notice what God promises: - Shelter from terror - Refuge from arrows - Protection from pestilence and plague |
| But notice what He doesn’t promise: *the absence of terror, arrows, pestilence, or plague.* |
| The dangers are still real. The threats still exist. But under the shadow, we’re covered. The evil that would destroy us cannot penetrate the shelter of those wings. |
| This is shadow grace: not immunity from trial, but invincibility in trial. Not escape from danger, but safety within danger. Not the absence of the storm, but the presence of Love in the storm. |

## 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.

But we’re covered. Sheltered. Never abandoned.

In the swamp, we felt alone. Isolated. Forgotten.

At the water’s edge, we discover the shadow. And in that shadow, we find we were never alone at all. Love has been with us all along, waiting for us to stop running and start resting.

The shadow isn’t the absence of light—it’s the shape love makes when it stands between us and harm.

| ## Song Integration |
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| ## 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. |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** But You call my name, You take the weight, You step right into my mistake. You tear the veil, You light the way, I won’t go back, I won’t be the same! |
| **[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! |
| **[Verse 2]** I’ve been restless, wide-eyed, sleepless, Haunted by my past. But Your blood is still my ransom, And Your love is built to last. |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** You call my name, You take the weight, You step right into my mistake. You tear the veil, You light the way, I won’t go back, I won’t be the same! |
| **[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! |
| **[Bridge]** No more hiding, no more grave, Hell is shaking, heaven stays! Chains are falling, fear erased, I am free in Jesus’ name! |
| **[Tag]** I won’t bow down, I won’t break, Darkness runs when I say His name! I won’t bow down, I won’t break, I’m alive in Jesus’ name! |
| **[Final 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! |
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## 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 |
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| ## Practice: Shadow Rest |
| Find a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted. If possible, find actual shade—under a tree, in the shadow of a building, anywhere with a clear contrast between sun and shadow. |
| Sit in the shadow. Feel the temperature difference. Notice how the same sun that would scorch you is now blocked by something substantial. |
| Close your eyes and pray: |
| **“God, I’m sitting in shadow right now. Physical shadow. And I need spiritual shadow too. I need Your covering. Your shelter. Your wings over me.”** |
| Name what you’re carrying: the shame, the fear, the exhaustion, the trial that won’t end. |
| Then pray: |
| **“I don’t understand why You haven’t removed this. But I trust that Your shadow is enough. Cover me. Shelter me. Let me rest here, under Your wings, trusting that You’re between me and the heat.”** |
| Sit there for as long as you can. Five minutes. Ten. Just rest. |
| Don’t ask for anything else. Don’t problem-solve. Don’t plan. Just rest in the shadow. |
| This is what dwelling looks like: choosing to stay in presence even when the trial isn’t over. Trusting that the shadow is sufficient. |

## 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.

You’re no longer running from the sun. You’re resting in the shadow.

The heat is still real. The sun still beats down. The journey is still hard.

But over you, sheltering you, covering you, is the shadow of the Almighty.

*Take a breath.*

You look up and see the source of the shadow: Love itself, standing between you and the scorching trial. Not removing it, but covering you through it.

And you realize: this is enough. Not what you wanted, perhaps. But enough.

The shadow proves the light is real.

And where there’s light, there’s the One who is Light.

So you breathe. You rest. You trust.

And you take the next step, knowing you’re not walking alone. The shadow moves with you. The covering remains. The presence never leaves.

You’re learning to live in the shadow of grace.

And in that shadow, you’re finding something you didn’t expect: not escape from the wilderness, but peace within it.

Not the absence of trial, but the presence of Love in trial.

Not the end of the journey, but the strength to keep walking.

One step at a time.

Under His wings.

In the shadow of grace.

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Amazing-Grace-Female-Remastered.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.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 different. Grace is scandalous.

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 |
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| ## Stories of Scandalous Grace |
| **Want to hear more stories about this kind of grace?** |
| **The Prodigal Son: From the Pigpen to the Father’s Embrace (Luke 15:11-32)** |
| There’s a famous story Jesus told about a younger son who demanded his inheritance early (essentially wishing his father dead), left home, squandered everything in wild living, and ended up in a pigpen, so desperate he’s eating pig food. |
| From that pigpen, he makes a decision: |
| > “I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’” > > — Luke 15:18-19 (NLT) |
| He’s not expecting grace. He’s expecting to be a servant at best. He’s rehearsing his speech, his apology, his offer to earn his way back. |
| But watch what happens: |
| > “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.” > > — Luke 15:20 (NLT) |
| The father doesn’t wait for the apology. Doesn’t wait for the son to grovel. While the son is still far off, the father runs. |
| And when the son tries to give his speech, the father cuts him off. He calls for the best robe, a ring, sandals. He throws a party. |
| This is scandalous grace. The son deserves nothing. He’s squandered everything. He’s come home smelling like pigs. But the father doesn’t care about what he deserves. The father cares about who he is: his son. |
| Grace isn’t based on worthiness. It’s based on relationship. And in God’s economy, you’re a son or daughter not because you’ve earned it but because He’s declared it. |
| Henri Nouwen, in his profound meditation on this parable, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, writes: |
| > “The father’s love is unconditional… There are no ‘ifs.’ The love of the father is given, not as the reward for effort, but as a pure gift. The younger son did not deserve that love… But the father gives it anyway. The love of the father is free; it is not dependent on any behavior, performance, or result. It simply is.” > > — Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* |
| Nouwen spent hours contemplating Rembrandt’s painting of this scene, and he discovered something profound: the father’s hands on the son’s shoulders aren’t just holding—they’re blessing. One hand is strong and masculine, the other gentle and feminine. Together they represent the fullness of God’s love: both strength and tenderness, justice and mercy, power and compassion. |
| The son comes home to be a servant. The father makes him a son. That’s grace. |
| **The Woman Caught in Adultery: No Condemnation (John 8:1-11)** |
| The religious leaders drag a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. The Law says she should be stoned. They’re testing Jesus, trying to trap Him. |
| Jesus bends down and writes in the dust. Then He says: |
| > “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” > > — John 8:7 (NLT) |
| One by one, the accusers leave. Starting with the oldest—the ones who’ve lived long enough to know their own sin. |
| Finally, it’s just Jesus and the woman. And Jesus asks: |
| > “Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?’ ‘No, Lord,’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more.’” > > — John 8:10-11 (NLT) |
| No condemnation. Not “You’re forgiven because you promised never to do it again.” Not “You’re forgiven because you’ve suffered enough.” Just: “Neither do I.” |
| That’s grace. Unearned. Undeserved. Freely given. |
| And notice what follows: “Go and sin no more.” Grace doesn’t excuse sin—it empowers transformation. It doesn’t say, “Keep living however you want.” It says, “You’re free now. Free from condemnation. Free from the power of sin. So go live like the free person you are.” |
| **Zacchaeus: Grace That Seeks the Seeker (Luke 19:1-10)** |
| Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector—a collaborator with Rome, a thief who’s grown rich by extorting his own people. He’s hated. Despised. Excluded. |
| But he’s curious about Jesus. So he climbs a tree to see Him. |
| Jesus stops under the tree, looks up, and says: |
| > “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” > > — Luke 19:5 (NLT) |
| The crowd grumbles: “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” |
| But Zacchaeus responds to grace with transformation: |
| > “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” > > — Luke 19:8 (NLT) |
| Jesus didn’t demand restitution first. He offered relationship first. And the relationship produced transformation. |
| That’s how grace works. It doesn’t wait for us to fix ourselves. It meets us where we are, offers relationship, and then—out of that relationship—transformation flows. |
| John Ortberg captures this perfectly: |
| > “Grace is the offer of God’s ceaseless presence and irrational love. The only thing you have to do is to want to be with Jesus more than you want anything else.” > > — John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be* |
| Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus more than he wanted to maintain his reputation. He climbed a tree—ridiculous for a wealthy tax collector. And Jesus saw him, called him down, and offered relationship. That’s grace—meeting us in our ridiculous, desperate seeking and saying, “Come down. I want to be with you.” |

## The Core Scripture Truth

Here’s the theological bedrock of everything we’re exploring in Ephesians 2:8-9:

Let’s unpack this verse phrase by phrase, because it changes everything.

**“By grace you have been saved”:**

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 |
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| ## 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. |
| Modern Christianity has a complicated relationship with “wretch.” Some hymnals have softened it: “that saved and strengthened me” or “that saved a soul like me.” But the softening misses the point entirely. Grace only makes sense if we’re honest about what we’re being saved from. If we’re basically good people who just need a little help, grace isn’t amazing—it’s redundant. But if we’re wretches—so far gone we can’t save ourselves, having actively participated in evil—then grace isn’t just nice. It’s necessary. It’s scandalous. It’s amazing. |
| The word “wretch” isn’t about self-loathing. It’s about honest assessment. Romans 3:23 doesn’t say “all have stumbled a little”—it says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All. Every single one. We’re all wretches in need of grace. And that’s good news. Because if grace is only for the basically good, most of us are disqualified. But if grace is for wretches, we all qualify. |
| The original writing from my blog captures the journey: “I traded it in for my version of freedom / Ruling others from my own throne.” This is the Genesis 3 temptation: “You will be like God”—the seductive belief that we can define reality for ourselves, that autonomy is the highest good. So I took the gifts I’d been given and threw them away for my version of freedom. And my version of freedom turned out to be slavery. “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.” |
| Sometimes God lets us exhaust our own options. He doesn’t intervene the moment we start running. He lets the path we’ve chosen reveal its true nature. He lets us hit the dead end. Not because He’s cruel, but because that’s when we’re finally ready to listen. The dead-end path isn’t punishment. It’s mercy. |
| “I stepped off that dead end road / And simply trusted He would save / With each step I took, I felt His hand / Lifting me out of my grave.” *Simply trusted.* Not “I cleaned myself up and then approached.” Just trust. That’s all grace requires. Not perfection, not performance. And the miracle: with each step toward the water, I felt His hand. Not after I arrived. *With each step.* He met me in the moving. Grace active, present, immediate. |
| The three verses I recorded trace the journey. Verse 1: The Rescue—“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me.” All passive voice—things done *to* me, not *by* me. Grace is the actor. I’m the recipient. Verse 2: The Fear and Relief—grace teaches holy fear (appropriate awe) and relieves fear (terror of condemnation). Both. Verse 3: The Testimony—“’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far / And grace will lead me home.” Looking back: I didn’t survive through my own strength. Looking forward: grace *will* lead me home. Certainty. |
| “Amazing Grace” has endured for centuries because we’re all wretches, and we all need grace. The scandal isn’t just that grace saved me once. The scandal is that grace keeps saving me—daily, hourly, every time I turn from the dead-end path and move toward the water’s edge. |

## 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 |
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| ## Practice: Writing Your Grace Story |
| Grace becomes real when it becomes personal. When it’s not just doctrine but story. |
| Take some time—unhurried time—and write your own grace story. Not a theological essay. A story. |
| Answer these prompts: |
| - Where was I when grace found me? - What dead-end road had I traveled? - What did I think about myself? About God? About my worthiness to be loved? - When did I hear the invitation to turn toward the water’s edge? - What did stepping toward grace feel like? - How has grace lifted me from my grave? |
| Don’t worry about making it sound polished or spiritual. Write it honestly. Write it in your own voice. Write it as your testimony. |
| And then, if possible, share it with someone. Not to impress them. Just to declare it. To say out loud: This is what grace did for me. |
| Because when grace stops being doctrine and becomes your story, it changes everything. |

## 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.

You look down at your feet and you can see them clearly for the first time in years. The water is so clear you can see straight to the bottom. And you realize: This is what I’ve been longing for. Not just to be clean, but to be seen—truly seen—and loved anyway.

*Take a breath.*

You cup water in your hands and pour it over your arms. The mud runs off in brown streams. Underneath: skin. Your actual skin. You’d almost forgotten what it looked like.

You’re still a mess. You’re still covered in swamp residue. But you’re also being washed. Both are true at the same time.

And from somewhere deep inside—deeper than the shame, deeper than the fear, deeper than the old lies—you hear it rising up. Your voice. Singing.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.*

It’s not just a hymn anymore. It’s your story.

You’re at the water’s edge. You’ve stepped in. And grace is washing you clean.

One step at a time. One breath at a time. One grace-filled moment at a time.

You’re being made new. And it’s only just beginning.

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Dig-a-Little-Deeper.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.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.

But now I need to ask you something uncomfortable:

**Are you willing to let grace go deeper than the surface?**

Because here’s what I’ve learned: Getting clean isn’t the same as getting healed.

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 |
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| ## Stories of Digging Deeper |
| **Want to hear some ancient stories about this kind of excavation?** |
| **Isaac Re-Digging the Wells (Genesis 26:18)** |
| Picture the scene: Isaac is living in the Negev, the dry southern desert where his father Abraham once dwelt. Water is life here—without wells, there’s no survival. No water for people, no water for flocks, no way to stay in the land. |
| Abraham had done the hard work years before. He’d dug deep wells, found water, established a life. But after Abraham died, enemies came and filled in every single well. They hauled dirt and rocks, stopped up the openings, buried the sources. It was sabotage—an attempt to drive Isaac out, to reclaim the land, to erase Abraham’s legacy. |
| Isaac could have left. Could have said, “The wells are gone. The work is undone. I’ll start somewhere else.” |
| But he didn’t. The text says: |
| > “He reopened the wells his father had dug, which the Philistines had filled in after Abraham’s death. Isaac also restored the names Abraham had given them.” > > — Genesis 26:18 (NLT) |
| Isaac had to dig again. Shovel by shovel, stone by stone, removing the fill, excavating through layers of debris until he hit the original well shaft. The wells had been there. His father had done the work. Water had flowed. But over time, they’d been deliberately stopped up, buried, hidden. |
| Now Isaac had to re-dig them. Hard, sweaty, exhausting work. Digging through sabotage. Excavating through enemy interference. Going back to what was true from the beginning. |
| This is the work of excavation. The well was dug. Your true identity was established. The truth about you was set. The well is there. |
| But over the years, enemies have filled it in. Trauma, lies, shame, false beliefs—they’ve stopped up the well. |
| Digging deeper means re-opening the wells. Going back to what was true from the beginning. Excavating through all the fill until you hit water again. |
| And when you do, the water is still there. |
| Still living. Still life-giving. |
| **Deep Calls to Deep (Psalm 42:7)** |
| The psalmist writes: |
| > “I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me.” > > — Psalm 42:7 (NLT) |
| There’s a depth in Reality that calls to the depth in you. Not the surface you. Not the performed you. The real you. The deep you. |
| Love doesn’t want your mask. It wants your heart. Doesn’t want your performance. Wants your presence. |
| The only way to give access to your depth is to dig. To go below the surface. To cut through the scar tissue and invite healing into the wound. |
| Deep calls to deep. The depth of Love is reaching for the depth of your need. |
| When they meet, healing happens. |
| Timothy Keller writes: |
| > “We never become safe from temptation. We become holy not by avoiding sin, but by loving God. When we flee to God in our fear and brokenness, we find that He can use even our darkest moments to draw us deeper into His love.” > > — Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* |
| The deep waters aren’t a place to avoid—they’re the place where we encounter Love most profoundly. When we stop running from our depths and instead invite healing into them, transformation becomes possible. |
| **The Woman at the Well Going Deeper (John 4)** |
| It’s noon—the hottest part of the day. No one comes to the well at noon if they can help it. You come in the morning or evening when it’s cooler, when the other women are there, when drawing water becomes a social event. |
| But this woman comes at noon. Alone. Because she can’t face the other women. Can’t bear the stares, the whispers, the judgment. Five marriages. Five. And the man she’s with now isn’t even her husband. Everyone knows. Everyone talks. |
| So she comes when no one else is there. |
| Except today, there’s a Jewish man sitting by the well. A Jew. In Samaria. Jews don’t come here. And they definitely don’t talk to Samaritan women. |
| But He does. “Give me a drink.” |
| The conversation starts surface-level, defensive: |
| Woman: “You’re a Jew. I’m a Samaritan. Why are you even talking to me?” |
| Jesus could have stayed at that level—cultural barriers, religious differences, safe territory. But He goes deeper: |
| Jesus: “If you knew who was asking, you’d ask me for living water.” |
| Woman: “You don’t have a bucket. Where’s this water coming from?” |
| Still surface. Still literal. Still protected. But Jesus goes deeper: |
| Jesus: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.” |
| Woman: “Sir, give me this water!” |
| Getting closer. She’s starting to want something. But Jesus goes even deeper: |
| Jesus: “Go call your husband.” |
| There it is. The question she dreads. The reality she can’t escape. |
| Woman: “I don’t have a husband.” |
| She states it simply. Flatly. Hoping that ends it. |
| Jesus: “You’re right. You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re with now isn’t your husband.” |
| Now we’re at the wound. The shame. The thing she came at noon to avoid facing. The thing everyone in town whispers about. The reason she’s alone. |
| And Jesus—He doesn’t condemn her. Doesn’t lecture her. Doesn’t pull back in disgust. He just sees her. Fully. Knows her completely. And still offers her living water. |
| From this depth—the place of wound and shame and honesty—she encounters Jesus as the Messiah. And everything changes. She leaves her water jar behind and runs back to town, no longer hiding, and tells everyone: “Come see a man who told me everything I ever did!” |
| That’s what happens when we let truth go deep. Transformation flows from depth, not surface. |

## The Core Scripture Truth

Here’s the promise that makes digging possible:

“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 |
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| ## 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. |
| My counselor, Dr. Petit, explained it with devastating clarity: “It’s been said time heals all wounds…yet for the untreated or poorly treated wound, time will infect then scar. For the unset or improperly set bone, time will knit then lame.” This is medically accurate. A wound left untreated doesn’t heal—it becomes infected and forms scar tissue over the infection. A broken bone left unset knits back together in the wrong position, leaving you permanently lame. |
| The same is true spiritually and emotionally. Time doesn’t heal soul wounds. Proper treatment does. And proper treatment requires digging—opening the wound, draining the infection, then giving time as the servant of healing rather than as the supposed healer itself. For years, I’d been functioning around my wounds rather than healing them. I looked healed. I sounded healed. But I was just well-rehearsed at hiding. |
| The turning point came when my counselor helped me distinguish between the “reactive self” and the “real self.” After moments when I’d reacted poorly, he would ask: “What specifically was reactive? Once that becomes clear, we can explore why that’s a trigger.” That question opened the door to excavation. Triggers aren’t random. They’re connected to wounds. To disarm the trigger, you have to heal the wound. But to heal the wound, you have to open it. |
| This terrified me. The wound was covered, scarred over. Opening it meant feeling the original pain again. Meant acknowledging how deep it went. Meant admitting I wasn’t as healed as I’d been pretending to be. |
| The song begins by calling out the platitude: “They say that time can heal what’s broke, but it just whispers empty hope.” Time as healer is an empty promise. The pre-chorus captures the breaking point: “I tried to fake it ’til I made it, but I can’t outrun what’s breaking me.” The decision to stop running and start digging. |
| The chorus is theologically crucial: “So I’m gonna dig a little deeper, down where the hurting hides. Open the scar so grace can reach, the pain that’s buried deep inside.” We don’t dig just to feel the pain—we dig so grace can reach what’s been inaccessible. As long as the wound is buried under scar tissue, grace can’t touch it. But when we expose it to light and truth, grace can do its healing work. “It’s gonna hurt, I know it will, and healing starts when I finally feel.” |
| Verse two introduces the promise that makes excavation possible: “Truth won’t run, it stands its ground, and mercy whispers through the sound: ‘You’re not alone, I’m still right here, even in your tears.’” Presence in the pain. God doesn’t wait until we’re healed to show up. He meets us in the mess, in the tears, in the raw exposed wound. Not after them, not despite them, but in them. |
| The bridge confesses dependence: “I can’t do this on my own, but I was never meant to be alone.” We can’t heal ourselves. We need divine help and human help—counselors, friends, community. “You reach into the mess I’ve made, and call my broken heart by name.” God doesn’t wait for us to clean up before reaching in. He reaches into the chaos and calls our hearts by name—identity based not on our wounds but on whose we are. |
| The final chorus testifies: “So I dig a little deeper, You meet me in the pain. You wash my wounds with holy light, and I am whole again. It hurts, but I can feel again.” The paradox of healing: the pain doesn’t disappear, but it’s no longer the only reality. God’s presence in the pain is also real. And presence transforms pain from something that destroys to something that refines. |
| Since writing this song, excavation has become a rhythm, not a one-time event. But I’m no longer afraid of the digging. The deeper I go, the more grace I find. Time doesn’t heal all wounds. But grace—when we’re willing to dig deep enough to let it reach us—heals what time cannot. |

## Lyrics: Dig a Little Deeper

**Verse 1** They say that time can heal what’s broke, But it just whispers empty hope. I’ve waited long, I’ve played the game, But every day still feels the same.

The echoes say, “Just give it time,” But time’s been cruel to heart and mind. If healing comes with every day, Why do I still feel this way?

**Pre-Chorus** I tried to fake it ’til I made it, But I can’t outrun what’s breaking me.

**Chorus** So I’m gonna dig a little deeper, Down where the hurting hides. Open the scar so grace can reach, The pain that’s buried deep inside. It’s gonna hurt, I know it will, And healing starts when I finally feel. I’m gonna dig, dig a little deeper, ’Til I find my soul.

**Verse 2** The night comes calling like before, I see those shadows on my door. Every memory wakes again, I feel the weight I can’t defend.

Truth won’t run, it stands its ground, And mercy whispers through the sound: “You’re not alone, I’m still right here, Even in your tears.”

**Pre-Chorus** I’ve tried to numb it, tried to drown it, But grace keeps reaching down for me.

**Chorus** So I’m gonna dig a little deeper, Down where the hurting hides. Open the scar so grace can reach, The pain that’s buried deep inside. It’s gonna hurt, I know it will, And healing starts when I finally feel. I’m gonna dig, dig a little deeper, ’Til I find my soul.

**Verse 3 (The Turning Point)** Morning breaks, the light comes in, A softer voice beneath my skin. The chains I wore begin to slide, As mercy breathes me back to life.

I feel Your love in every breath, A quiet peace where fear once slept. I’m not the same, I’m waking new, The pain is real — but so are You.

**Bridge** I can’t do this on my own, But I was never meant to be alone. You reach into the mess I’ve made, And call my broken heart by name. You say, “Come and drink from the well that won’t run dry.” And for the first time, I believe — I’m alive.

**Final Chorus** So I dig a little deeper, You meet me in the pain. You wash my wounds with holy light, And I am whole again. It hurts, but I can feel again, I can laugh, I can cry again. ’Cause I dug, I dug a little deeper, And I found You there within.

| ## Key Takeaways |
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| ## Reflections for the Road |
| These aren’t questions to answer quickly. They’re invitations to dig. |
| **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? |
| 4. **Read Psalm 42 slowly. What is the “deep” that’s calling to the “deep” in you right now?** |
| Don’t rush past this. Let the imagery sink in. Waterfalls. Waves. Depths. What is Love inviting you into? What is it calling out of you? |

## Practice: Excavation Journaling

This is hard work. Don’t rush it. Set aside unhurried time—maybe a whole afternoon or evening. Find a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted.

Bring your journal. And pray this prayer:

**“God, I invite You to excavate. Show me the layers I’ve been living under. Help me dig through performance, shame, wounds, and false beliefs until I hit bedrock truth. I trust that Your grace is deep enough to reach all the way down. Give me courage to not turn away from what You uncover. And help me know I’m not alone in this. Amen.”**

Then work through these layers, one at a time:

**Layer 1: Performance** - How do I perform for others? What version of myself do I present? - What am I afraid people will see if I stop performing?

**Layer 2: Shame** - What do I believe about myself that I’m ashamed of? - Complete this sentence: “If people really knew \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ about me, they would \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

**Layer 3: Wounds** - What are the significant wounds I carry? (Name them. Be specific.) - How have these wounds shaped the way I relate to God, to others, to myself?

**Layer 4: False Beliefs** - What conclusions did I draw from my wounds? - What lies do I believe about my worth, my identity, my belovedness?

**Layer 5: Bedrock Truth** - Beneath all the layers, what is the truth God speaks over me? - What does Scripture say about my identity?

Write honestly. Don’t edit. Don’t make it sound spiritual. Just dig.

And when you hit bedrock—when you uncover the truth underneath all the layers—receive it. Let it sink in. Let it be the foundation you build on.

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| ## 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. |
| You dig through shame—the voice that’s been screaming “you’re not enough” for years. You name it as a lie, and the water washes it away. |
| You dig through the wounds—the places where you were hurt, betrayed, abandoned. You open them to the light and air, and you feel the sting. But you also feel the water, clean and living, flowing into the wound. Washing out the infection. Beginning to heal what’s been festering in the dark. |
| You dig through the false beliefs—“I’m broken beyond repair,” “I’m too much,” “I’m not enough,” “If they really knew me, they’d leave”—and as each one surfaces, you hold it up to the light. And in the light, you see it for what it is: a lie. Not bedrock. Not truth. Just debris. |
| And finally—finally—you hit bedrock. |
| Solid. Unshakeable. True. |
| *Take a breath.* |
| You are loved. You are worthy. You are enough. You are beloved. Not because of what you do. Because of who you are. Who you’ve always been, underneath. |
| The water is deeper here. But you’re not drowning. You’re standing. On bedrock. And the current that once felt threatening now feels like an embrace. |
| You’ve dug a little deeper. And what you found—what was there all along—is grace. Deep, abiding, bedrock grace. |
| Great is His faithfulness. New every morning. Deep enough to reach the deepest wound. Strong enough to carry you through the healing. |
| You’re not done digging. There’s always more to uncover. Always deeper to go. |
| But you’re not afraid anymore. Because you know now: the deeper you dig, the more grace you find. |
| And grace, you’re discovering, has no bottom. |

# 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Mindful-Bliss-Female.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/I-Will-Trust-You-Lord.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Redemption-Story-Female.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Nothing-is-Wasted-Remastered.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Devils-On-The-Run-III-Remix-Remastered-Remix.mp3)

**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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/This-Moment-is-Enough.mp3)

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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Mindful-Bliss-Female.mp3)

**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.

But now I need to ask you something important:

**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.**

This chapter is about the shift from frenzy to rhythm. From desperate intervention to daily bread. From crisis faith to sustainable presence.

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 |
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| ## Stories of Rhythm |
| **The Manna in the Wilderness (Exodus 16:4-31)** |
| God’s provision for Israel in the wilderness wasn’t a one-time miracle. It was a daily rhythm. Every morning, manna appeared on the ground. Every morning, the people had to go out and gather it. |
| > “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.’” > > — Exodus 16:4 |
| This was a test. But not the kind we usually think of. Not a test of performance. A test of trust. |
| Could they gather only what they needed for today and trust that tomorrow would have its own provision? |
| Some couldn’t. They tried to hoard manna for the next day, and it rotted. They tried to control tomorrow’s provision, and it turned to worms. |
| But those who learned the rhythm—gather today’s manna, trust tomorrow’s will come—were sustained. Day after day. Year after year. Bread from heaven in daily rhythm. |
| God could have given them a month’s worth at once. He didn’t. Because He was teaching them something more important than efficient meal planning. |
| He was teaching them to trust. To live in daily dependence. To develop a rhythm of receiving. |
| The same lesson applies to us. We want the mega-dose of grace that will last forever. God gives us daily bread. Not because He’s stingy, but because He wants relationship. He wants us to come back every morning. To receive fresh grace. To maintain the rhythm. |
| **Elijah’s Rhythm of Rest and Engagement (1 Kings 19:1-18)** |
| Elijah had just experienced one of the greatest spiritual victories in Israel’s history. Mount Carmel. Fire from heaven consuming the water-soaked altar. The prophets of Baal defeated, executed. Rain ending a three-year drought. The entire nation witnessing God’s power. Elijah at the peak of his ministry, running in the strength of the Lord. |
| And then, one message from Queen Jezebel: “By this time tomorrow, you’ll be dead like the prophets you killed.” |
| And Elijah crashed. |
| Not gradually. Instantly. He ran for his life into the wilderness, a day’s journey into barren, empty wasteland. He collapsed under a broom tree—a scraggly desert bush offering minimal shade—and prayed to die: |
| “I have had enough, LORD. Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors” (1 Kings 19:4). |
| This is burnout. Total depletion. The crash after the adrenaline high. One day he’s calling down fire; the next day he wants to die. |
| God’s response is instructive. He didn’t rebuke Elijah for weakness. Didn’t say, “Pull yourself together—you just won a great victory!” Didn’t lecture him about faith or courage. Didn’t demand that he get back to work. |
| Instead, God gave him exactly what he needed: rest, food, and time. |
| An angel touched him: “Get up and eat.” Elijah opened his eyes to find fresh-baked bread and a jar of water. He ate. And slept. The angel came again: “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” Again, Elijah ate and drank. And then he traveled forty days and nights to Mount Horeb, strengthened by that food, resting as he went. |
| Only after that—after Elijah had been physically restored, emotionally recovered, spiritually renewed—did God speak to him. Not in the earthquake or the wind or the fire, but in a gentle whisper. And only then did God give him his next assignment. |
| God honored the rhythm. Work. Rest. Engagement. Withdrawal. Victory. Recovery. Intensity. Sabbath. |
| Elijah had been running on adrenaline and spiritual intensity. God invited him into sustainable rhythm. |
| This is permission for us. You can have a mountain-top experience and then need to rest. That’s not failure. That’s human. That’s how God designed you. |
| Elijah’s story tells me: It’s okay to be tired after a victory. It’s okay to need recovery time. It’s okay to sleep and eat and rest before diving into the next thing. |
| God isn’t impressed by our burnout. He’s pleased by our sustainability. |
| **The Sabbath Rest (Genesis 2:2-3; Mark 2:27)** |
| The pattern of Sabbath is woven into creation itself. On the seventh day, God rested. Not because He was tired. But to establish a pattern. A rhythm. Six days of work. One day of rest. |
| This isn’t arbitrary. It’s design. God made you to need rest. To need rhythm. To need patterns of engagement and withdrawal, work and Sabbath. |
| When the religious leaders tried to turn Sabbath into a legalistic burden, Jesus reclaimed it: |
| > “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” > > — Mark 2:27 |
| Sabbath is a gift. A rhythm designed for your flourishing. It’s not about rule-keeping. It’s about soul-keeping. |
| Sabbath says: Your worth isn’t measured by your productivity. You are beloved even when you’re not producing. In fact, resting is an act of faith—trusting that God will sustain the world for 24 hours without your help. |
| I used to see Sabbath as wasted time. A day I could be getting things done. But now I see it as the axis around which the whole week revolves. The day that reminds me: I am not what I produce. I am God’s beloved child. And that’s enough. |
| Walter Brueggemann writes: |
| > “Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes. It is the pause that transforms.” > — Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* |
| This is what I’m learning. Sabbath isn’t just recovery time so I can work harder the next week. It’s transformative time—reshaping how I see myself, my work, my worth. The pause itself does the deeper 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 |
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| ## 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. |
| **[Verse 2]** Morning dew reflects Your tender grace, The sunlight streaks reveal Your holy face. Each step I take along the sandy trail, Your voice reminds me, love will never fail. |
| **[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. |
| **[Verse 3]** Starry skies proclaim Your mighty name, The moon’s soft glow reveals Your love remains. I lift my heart and cast my cares above, Your Spirit wraps me in eternal love. |
| **[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. |
| **[Bridge]** 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. |
| **[Verse 4]** This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long. Mercies descending from heaven above, Filling my heart with Your endless love. |
| **[Outro]** Into mindful bliss, I rest in Your grace, Each moment I live, I behold Your face. Your mercies endure, Your promises stay, Forever I’ll walk in Your holy way. |

## 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.

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| ## Reflections for the Road |
| **Questions for the Journey:** |
| 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? |
| 4. **What rhythm is missing from your life right now?** |
| Sabbath? Daily prayer? Regular solitude? Time in nature? Unhurried meals? Creative expression? |
| Be specific. What would it look like to build this rhythm into your week? |
| 5. **How will you protect one rhythm this week?** |
| Not add more. Protect one. Sabbath, daily prayer, a walk, a practice that brings life. |
| What will you say no to in order to say yes to this rhythm? When will you do it? Put it on your calendar right now. |

## Practice: Creating Your Rule of Life

Many Christians throughout history have created what they called a “Rule of Life”—not rules in the legalistic sense, but rhythms. Patterns. A framework for sustainable spiritual living.

Here’s a simple process:

### 1. Listen to your life

What brings you life? What drains you? When do you feel most connected to God? Pay attention for a few days.

### 2. Identify life-giving rhythms

Based on what you’ve noticed, what rhythms sustain you? Morning prayer? Weekly Sabbath? Daily walks? Regular connection with friends?

### 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. What worked last year might not work this year. That’s okay. The goal is sustainability, not perfection.

### 5. Review and adjust

Every few months, review your rhythms. What’s working? What’s not? What needs to change?

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| ## 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. |
| You’re flowing. With grace. In rhythm. |
| Some days the water is calm. You float. You rest. You simply be. |
| Some days the water is active. You swim. You work. You engage. But even the swimming feels different now. You’re not swimming against the current, desperately trying to get somewhere. You’re swimming with it, letting it carry you along. |
| You look up and see the sun filtering through the water. Streaks of light. Steady. Reliable. New every morning. |
| Great is His faithfulness. |
| You take a breath—deep, full, unforced. And you realize: this is sustainable. This is how you were meant to live. Not in crisis mode. Not in frenzy. But in rhythm. In flow. In the unforced rhythms of grace. |
| Into mindful bliss. |
| # 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/I-Will-Trust-You-Lord.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.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.**

You need more than sustainable patterns. You need deep foundations. The kind that reach down to streams of living water and anchor you when everything else shakes.

This chapter is about what happens underground. The hidden work. The slow transformation that no one sees but everyone eventually experiences.

It’s about discovering that you’re not just learning new habits—you’re becoming a new person. And becoming takes time. It happens in the dark, unseen, in the patient work of roots going deep.

*Think of a tree during drought. Surface plants die—they had no depth, no reserves, nothing to draw from when conditions got hard. But the deeply rooted? They stay green. Not because they’re stronger or trying harder. Because their roots have gone deep enough to reach water others can’t access.*

That’s what this chapter is about. Not what you look like on the surface. But what’s happening underground.

Deep roots require putting to death what doesn’t belong: pride, reactivity, isolation, bitterness. And cultivating what does: humility, responsiveness, connection, forgiveness.

None of this is impressive. None of this gets applause. None of this makes for a dramatic testimony.

But it’s everything. Because roots determine what happens above ground.

So before you continue, pause. Consider:

*Can you say, even with hesitation: “God, I don’t just want to look different. I want to BE different. Do the deep work in me—the underground work, the unseen work. Send my roots down deep until I’m anchored in You, not in circumstances.”*

That’s the prayer that opens transformation.

Because what comes next isn’t about impressive growth. It’s about sustainable depth.

Here’s the hard truth about roots: you can’t see them. You can’t measure them. You can’t Instagram them.

All the visible growth—the fruit, the leaves, the branches—gets attention. But the roots? They’re hidden. Underground. Doing their work in the dark.

This is frustrating for those of us who like to track progress. We want to see results. We want to measure growth. We want before-and-after photos that prove we’re changing.

But deep roots don’t work that way.

Deep roots look like: - Choosing to respond instead of react, even when no one’s watching - Forgiving someone who doesn’t deserve it and will never know you did - Staying connected to community when you’d rather withdraw - Releasing bitterness for the hundredth time because it keeps trying to take root - Practicing humility in small, daily choices that no one applauds

None of that is impressive. None of that gets likes on social media. None of that makes for a dramatic testimony.

But it’s everything. Because roots determine what happens above ground.

When the drought comes—and it will come—surface plants die. They had no depth. No reserves. Nothing to draw from when conditions got hard.

But the deeply rooted? They stay green. Not because they’re stronger or trying harder. Because their roots have gone deep enough to reach water others can’t access.

The question isn’t “What do I look like on the surface?”

The question is “What’s happening underground?”

| ## Key Themes |
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| ## Stories of Roots and Growth |
| **The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23)** |
| Picture a farmer at sunrise, walking through his field with a bag of seed slung across his shoulder. He reaches in, pulls out a handful, and with a practiced motion scatters it in a wide arc. The seeds catch the light as they fly—some landing on the hardened path where people walk, some on the rocky outcropping at the field’s edge, some among the tangle of thistles and thornbushes, and some on the rich, dark soil he’s spent years cultivating. |
| The birds descend immediately on the path—quick, efficient, merciless. The seed never had a chance. Hard ground, no penetration, gone. |
| The rocky ground is more deceptive. Within days, bright green shoots push through the thin layer of soil. It looks promising—fast growth, visible progress. But underneath, the roots hit stone. They can’t go deep. They spread sideways, searching for depth that isn’t there. When the sun climbs high and hot, these plants are the first to wilt. No water reaches them. The shallow soil heats up. They brown, curl, die. Speed isn’t the same as strength. |
| The thorny ground also shows promise at first. The seeds germinate, the plants grow. But so do the weeds. Thorns that were cut back last season return with a vengeance, growing faster, reaching higher. They don’t kill the good plants outright—they just crowd them out. Steal their light. Choke their growth. The plants survive but never thrive, never fruit. They’re strangled slowly by competition for resources. |
| But the good soil—this is different. The seeds sink in. The roots go down, spreading through soil that’s been broken up, enriched, prepared. When the sun beats down, these roots reach moisture. When storms come, these roots hold firm. The plants grow steadily—not frantically, but surely. And when harvest comes, they’re heavy with grain. Thirty, sixty, a hundred times what was planted. |
| The rocky ground is particularly relevant here: |
| > “The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.” > > — Matthew 13:20-21 |
| No root. That’s the problem. Enthusiasm without depth. Emotion without foundation. |
| The person receives the Word with joy—there’s initial excitement, genuine response. But when heat comes, they wither. Why? No root. |
| This is the warning: don’t settle for surface-level faith. Don’t mistake initial enthusiasm for deep transformation. Send roots deep now—through sustained practices, patient trust, consistent rhythms—so when heat comes (and it will), you don’t wither. |
| The good soil represents those who “hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop” (Mark 4:20). But even good soil requires cultivation. Weeding. Watering. Tending. |
| The disciplines are how you cultivate the soil of your soul so roots can go deep and fruit can come. |
| **The Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-8)** |
| Walk through a vineyard in late summer and you’ll see the vine—thick, gnarled, ancient—with branches spreading out in all directions. Run your hand along a healthy branch and you can feel it: firm, supple, alive. The connection point where branch meets vine is seamless, organic. Sap flows from the vine through that connection, carrying nutrients, water, life itself. |
| Pick up a branch that’s been cut off and the difference is immediate. It looks similar at first—same shape, same leaves. But touch it and you feel the brittleness. The leaves are already starting to brown at the edges. Give it a few days and it’s completely dead, fit only for burning. |
| > “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.” > > — John 15:5 |
| The key word is “remain”—or “abide.” This is the language of roots, of connection that sustains life. Branches don’t try to produce fruit through effort or willpower. They remain connected to the vine. And fruit happens naturally, inevitably, organically. |
| You don’t manufacture fruit through striving. You remain connected through sustained practices—prayer that keeps the conversation going, Scripture that keeps the life flowing, worship that keeps the heart open, community that keeps the connection strong. And fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—grows the way grapes grow on a branch: not by trying, but by remaining. |
| But remaining requires intentionality. A branch doesn’t have to work to stay connected, but it can be cut off if diseased. It can be pruned to produce more fruit. It can even choose to pull away from the vine. The vinedresser tends the branches carefully, cutting away what’s dead, trimming back what’s unproductive, ensuring that every branch that remains produces as much fruit as possible. |
| The unforced rhythms of grace aren’t passive—they’re active cooperation with God’s life flowing into you. You position yourself under the flow. You remain in the connection. You abide in the relationship. And the fruit comes, not from your effort but from His life in you. |
| **Jeremiah’s Promise (Jeremiah 17:7-8)** |
| Picture two trees in the same region during a drought year. The first tree stands alone in an open field, dependent entirely on rainfall. Its roots spread wide but shallow, searching for moisture that isn’t there. As the rainless months stretch on, its leaves yellow, then brown. It drops them early, conserving what little moisture remains. It survives, barely, but produces no fruit this year. Maybe next year, if the rains return. |
| The second tree looks different even from a distance. Its leaves are deep green, almost glossy. It stands tall, full, healthy—not because it’s stronger or more resilient by nature, but because of where it’s planted: right by a stream. You can see its roots at the water’s edge, thick and gnarled, disappearing into the mud. Those roots don’t just touch the water—they’re in it, drawing constantly from a source that doesn’t depend on weather patterns. |
| > “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” > > — Jeremiah 17:7-8 |
| This is Jeremiah’s promise, and it’s built on trust and resilience. |
| **Trust as the foundation.** Your roots go where your trust is. If you trust yourself, roots stay shallow—limited by your capacity. If you trust God, roots go deep—accessing an infinite source. |
| **Does not fear when heat comes.** This is the promise: resilience. Heat will come. But deeply rooted trees don’t fear it. Not because heat doesn’t hurt, but because deep roots access water even when surface conditions are scorching. |
| **Never fails to bear fruit.** An even stronger promise than Psalm 1’s “fruit in season.” Why? Because the tree is constantly connected to the stream. It’s not dependent on rainfall (external circumstances). It’s rooted by a stream (constant internal source). |
| When you’re deeply rooted in God, you don’t become fruitless in hard seasons. The fruit might look different—not abundance, but endurance; not productivity, but presence. But you never fail to bear it. |

## 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 |
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| ## 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 I couldn’t see results. I still struggled with the same issues. Still reacted defensively. Still battled pride. Still felt the pull of isolation.

I was discouraged, wondering: *Is any of this working? Am I actually growing? Or am I just going through the motions?*

The answer, I discovered, was that transformation happens underground before it’s visible above the surface.

Then I read Psalm 1. And Jeremiah 17. And something clicked.

The tree planted by streams of water doesn’t produce fruit immediately. First, roots go down. Deep. Searching for water. Anchoring in soil. Building the underground foundation that will support everything above ground.

The fruit comes later. In season. When roots are ready.

I was expecting visible growth—immediate fruit, dramatic change, measurable progress. But God was doing underground work. Sending my roots deeper. Teaching me to draw from living water instead of surface emotions.

Psalm 1 became my anchor. The image of a tree “replanted in Eden, bearing fresh fruit every month, never dropping a leaf, always in blossom”—that’s not describing constant productivity. It’s describing sustainable fruitfulness rooted in something deeper than circumstances.

The tree thrives not because it tries harder but because it’s connected to a source of life that never runs dry.

That’s when “I Will Trust You Lord” was born. The song is a declaration: even when I can’t see growth, even when the work feels invisible, even when drought comes—my roots are going deep. I’m planted by streams of living water. And I will trust the hidden work.

The chorus captures the promise: “Like a tree beside the river, I will stand so tall. Through the fire, through the season, You’re my all in all.”

Not standing because I’m strong. Standing because I’m rooted. Not thriving because conditions are perfect. Thriving because I’m drawing from a source deeper than circumstances.

The bridge confronts the fears: “No fear in the drought… No doubt in the storm… Your love is my anchor… I’ll trust You, Lord.”

This isn’t denial. It’s confidence. Rooted confidence that says: I can face drought because my roots go deeper than surface water. I can weather storms because I’m anchored in something immovable.

When I sing this now, it reminds me: the work happening underground is just as real—maybe more real—than the work visible above ground. And if I’ll trust the process, keep showing up, keep putting roots down deep, the fruit will come.

In season. When roots are ready.

| ## Lyrics: I Will Trust You Lord |
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| ## 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?

## Practice: Cultivating Deep Roots

Here’s a simple framework for sending roots deep through spiritual disciplines:

### 1. Daily: Drink from the stream

Choose one practice that connects you to God daily. Morning prayer and Scripture. Lectio divina. Journaling. Listening prayer in silence. The practice matters less than the consistency.

### 2. Weekly: Sabbath rest

Set aside one day (or a few hours) each week for Sabbath. Not as legalism. As gift. Stop striving so you can receive rest. Stop producing so you can receive belovedness.

### 3. Monthly: Solitude and silence

Once a month, create extended space for solitude. A few hours. A half day. A full day if possible. Intentional time alone with God. Away from noise, hurry, screens, people. Listen. Rest. Let God search your heart.

### 4. Seasonally: Examine your roots

Every few months, review: Are my roots going deeper? Or am I staying shallow? Am I more reactive or more responsive? More isolated or more connected? More bitter or more forgiving?

### 5. Community: Grow in groves

Trees don’t grow in isolation. Their roots intertwine with other roots. You need community. Real community. Where you can confess struggles, receive prayer, offer encouragement, practice forgiveness, serve together.

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| ## 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. |
| But still standing. |
| You look up into the branches. Birds nest there. Squirrels scamper. Life thrives in the shelter this tree provides. |
| And then you look down. At the base. Where roots disappear into the earth. |
| You can’t see them. But you know they’re there. Reaching deep. Spreading wide. Anchoring this massive tree so firmly that no storm can topple it. |
| The roots are why the tree stands. |
| This is the invitation: send your roots deep. Not for show. Not for applause. Not even for immediate fruit. |
| For stability. For resilience. For sustainable life. |
| The work happens underground. In the quiet. In the daily practices. In the sustained rhythms. In the patient trust. |
| You won’t always see results. You won’t always feel growth. You won’t always sense progress. |
| But if you remain—if you keep showing up, keep practicing the disciplines, keep choosing connection over isolation, keep releasing bitterness and cultivating forgiveness—the roots will go deep. |
| And when heat comes, you won’t fear. When drought arrives, you won’t worry. When storms rage, you won’t be uprooted. |
| Because your roots—hidden, deep, sustained by streams of living water—will hold. |
| Like a tree planted by streams of water. Leaves green. Fruit in season. Soul strong. |
| Deeply rooted in the love of God. |
| # 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Redemption-Story-Female.mp3)

**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.

You’re not just surviving your circumstances. You’re participating in the grand narrative of redemption that’s been unfolding since before time began.

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 |
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| ## Stories of Redemption |
| **The Redemption Promise in Eden (Genesis 3:15)** |
| The moment sin enters the world, God speaks a promise of redemption: |
| > “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” > > — Genesis 3:15 |
| This is the first gospel proclamation—the protoevangelium. Even as God pronounces the curse, He promises redemption. A seed of the woman will come who will crush the serpent’s head. |
| The entire Old Testament is the unfolding of this promise. Through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, through David—the line is preserved. The promise is passed down. |
| Until finally, in the fullness of time, the Seed comes: Jesus, born of a woman, who crushes the serpent’s head at the cross. |
| Redemption wasn’t an afterthought. It was promised from the beginning. John Piper writes: |
| > “The gospel is not a new plan. It is the revelation of God’s eternal purpose—the mystery hidden for ages but now revealed.” > — John Piper, *God is the Gospel* |
| Before the foundation of the world, God knew. Before sin entered, redemption was planned. This is the depth of His love. |
| **Joseph’s Story (Genesis 37-50)** |
| Joseph’s story is one of the clearest pictures of “nothing is wasted” in all of Scripture. |
| Picture seventeen-year-old Joseph, his father’s favorite, wearing the coat of many colors that marks him as special. His brothers hate him for it—hate him for the favoritism, hate him for the dreams he tells about them bowing down to him. |
| One day they’re far from home, tending flocks. Joseph comes to check on them. And they see their chance. |
| They grab him. Strip off the hated coat. Throw him into an empty cistern—a dry pit in the ground. They sit down to eat lunch while he’s calling for help from the darkness below. Then they sell him to passing traders. Twenty shekels of silver. Their brother, sold like livestock. |
| Joseph ends up in Egypt as a slave in Potiphar’s house. He works his way up, proves himself trustworthy—and Potiphar’s wife notices him. She propositions him. He refuses. Day after day, she pursues him. Finally, she grabs his cloak, and when he runs, she uses it as evidence: “He attacked me!” |
| Joseph goes to prison. An innocent man, imprisoned for doing the right thing. For years, he’s there. He interprets dreams for fellow prisoners—the cupbearer and the baker. He asks the cupbearer to remember him when he’s released. But the cupbearer forgets. Two more years pass. |
| Then Pharaoh has a dream. The cupbearer finally remembers Joseph. And Joseph is brought from prison to palace in a single day. He interprets Pharaoh’s dream—seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh puts him in charge of preparing Egypt for the coming crisis. |
| The pit led to Potiphar’s house. The prison led to the palace. And ultimately, Joseph’s position saves not just Egypt, but his own family—the very brothers who betrayed him—when they come begging for food during the famine. |
| When his brothers finally recognize him and fear his revenge, Joseph speaks words that capture the heart of redemption: |
| “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). |
| What others meant for evil, God meant for good. What looked like wasted years—slavery, false accusation, imprisonment—became the preparation for his purpose. |
| Nothing—not one moment of suffering—was wasted in God’s economy. |
| **Peter’s Denial and Restoration (Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-19)** |
| Earlier that same night, Jesus had warned him: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). |
| Peter had protested: “Lord, I’m ready to go with you to prison and to death!” But Jesus knew better: “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” |
| Hours later, it happens. Jesus is arrested. Peter follows at a distance to the high priest’s courtyard. It’s cold. A fire burns in the center. People are gathered around it for warmth. Peter stands with them, trying to blend in, trying to stay close to Jesus without being identified as one of His followers. |
| A servant girl looks at him in the firelight. “This man was with him.” |
| Peter’s response is immediate: “Woman, I don’t know him.” |
| A little later, someone else sees him: “You also are one of them.” |
| “Man, I am not!” |
| About an hour passes. Peter is still there, still trying to remain anonymous. Another person insists: “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” |
| Peter replies with emphasis: “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” |
| Immediately, while he’s still speaking, the rooster crows. And at that moment, Jesus—being led past—turns and looks at Peter. Their eyes meet across the courtyard. And Peter remembers the prediction. He goes outside and weeps bitterly. |
| The enemy’s attack was real. Satan sifted Peter. The denial happened—three times, just as Jesus said it would. |
| But Jesus’ prayer was more powerful than Satan’s sifting. |
| After the resurrection, Jesus finds Peter fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They cook breakfast on the beach. And Jesus restores Peter—three questions mirroring the three denials, three affirmations of love, three commissions to feed His sheep. |
| “Simon son of John, do you love me?” |
| “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” |
| “Feed my lambs.” |
| Three times Jesus asks. Three times Peter answers. Three times Jesus commissions him. |
| The threefold denial is answered with threefold restoration. The damage is redeemed. The enemy’s attack is reversed. |
| The devil’s goal was to destroy Peter. But Jesus’ goal was to strengthen him through the trial. And Jesus won. |
| This is always the pattern: the enemy means it for harm, but God uses it for good. The devil attacks, but Christ restores. The accuser condemns, but the Advocate defends. |
| **Paul’s Transformation (Acts 9; 1 Timothy 1:12-16)** |
| Paul’s story is violence transformed into mission. |
| Before his conversion, he’s Saul of Tarsus, a rising star among the Pharisees. He’s breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He goes to the high priest and asks for letters to the synagogues in Damascus—authorization to hunt down Christians, arrest them, and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. |
| He’s on fire with religious zeal. He stood there approving when they stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He enters house after house in Jerusalem, dragging men and women off to prison. And now he’s taking his campaign on the road. |
| But on the road to Damascus, about noon, a light from heaven suddenly flashes around him—brighter than the sun. He falls to the ground. And he hears a voice: |
| “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” |
| “Who are you, Lord?” |
| “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” |
| The one he’s been hunting is hunting him. The one he thought was dead is very much alive. And in that moment, everything Saul thought he knew shatters. |
| Jesus tells him to go into Damascus and wait for instructions. Saul gets up from the ground, but when he opens his eyes, he can’t see. His companions have to lead him by the hand into the city. For three days, he’s blind. He doesn’t eat. Doesn’t drink. Just sits in the darkness, his entire worldview collapsing and rebuilding. |
| Then Jesus sends a disciple named Ananias to him. Ananias is terrified—he’s heard about Saul. But he obeys. He lays hands on Saul, and immediately something like scales falls from Saul’s eyes. He can see again. And he’s baptized. |
| The persecutor becomes the apostle. The one who tried to destroy the church becomes the one who builds it across the Roman Empire. The murderer becomes the missionary. |
| Paul never forgets his past. But he sees it redeemed: |
| > “I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man… But I was shown mercy… so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe.” > > — 1 Timothy 1:13-16 |
| His worst moments become testimonies to God’s greatest grace. Nothing wasted. |

## 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 |
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| ## Lyrics: Redemption Story |
| **[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. |
| **[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. |
| **[Verse 2]** In Eden’s garden, peace was found, Until the serpent’s lie unbound. The fruit was taken, the fall began, Sin entered the hearts of every man. Yet even then, God’s love remained, A Savior promised to break the chain. From Adam’s sin to grace restored, A plan of redemption from the Lord. |
| **[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. |
| **[Verse 3]** Through kings and prophets, His voice was heard, Declaring His truth, His holy word. David, the shepherd, a king would rise, Through his line, the Savior arrive. Isaiah spoke of a suffering King, Who’d bear our sins and salvation bring. Elijah’s fire, Daniel’s stand, God’s faithfulness across the land. |
| **[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. |
| **[Bridge]** 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. |
| **[Verse 4]** Mary, chosen, her heart so pure, Through her, God’s love would long endure. She held the Savior, her baby boy, The King of kings, her heart’s great joy. Did she know the cross He’d face, The pain, the nails, the world’s disgrace? Through grief, she trusted, through loss, she prayed, Believing in the plan God made. |
| **[Verse 5]** The leaders schemed, their hearts grew cold, Blinded by power, they sought control. They called Him a blasphemer, sentenced His death, Yet love endured with His final breath. Betrayed by a kiss for silver’s gleam, Denied by a friend in a broken dream. Yet grace would triumph, death undone, Victory through God’s risen Son. |
| **[Verse 6]** To die with Christ, to rise anew, To walk His path, His love pursue. The cross became the bridge to grace, A gift of life in His embrace. Through history’s thread, His story flows, A love eternal, a truth that grows. My story now entwined with His, A song of hope, a life that lives. |
| **[Final 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]** His story echoes through all of time, A Savior’s love, so pure, so kind. One day we’ll stand before His throne, Forever redeemed, forever His own. |

## 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.

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| ## Reflections for the Road |
| **Questions for the Journey:** |
| 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. |
| 2. **Read Romans 8:28-30 slowly.** “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… those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” Where do you see yourself in this redemption arc—called, justified, being glorified? Which stage feels most real to you right now? |
| 3. **What parts of your story feel wasted or meaningless?** The years in the swamp? The waiting seasons? The failures you still carry with shame? Name them specifically. Now read Genesis 50:20 slowly: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” Can you trust that God is redeeming even those chapters? |
| 4. **Whose redemption story gives you hope for yours?** Joseph betrayed by his brothers? Peter denying Jesus? Paul persecuting Christians? Someone you know personally whose story went from brokenness to beauty? What does their story tell you about your own? How does their testimony strengthen your faith? |
| 5. **How will you tell your redemption story to someone this week?** Not the whole thing. Maybe just one part—your swamp, your water’s edge moment, or how God is restoring what felt wasted. Who needs to hear it? Someone still in the swamp? Someone who thinks their story is too broken? Name the person. When will you share it? Make it specific. |

## Practice: Telling Your Redemption Story

One of the most powerful spiritual practices is learning to tell your redemption story. Here’s a framework:

### 1. Creation - Who you were made to be

Before the swamp. Before the brokenness. Who did God create you to be? What gifts? What longings? What was the original design?

### 2. Fall - Your swamp

Name it. Be specific. What was your particular experience of brokenness? Don’t sugarcoat it. The fall was real. The swamp was deep.

### 3. Redemption - Your water’s edge encounter

When did you meet grace? What was your turning point? How did God pursue you? When did you respond? What changed?

### 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? What rhythms have you learned? What roots have you grown?

### 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. How does that hope sustain you?

### 6. Share your story

Your redemption story isn’t just for you. It’s a testimony of God’s faithfulness that can encourage others. Find someone to share it with.

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| ## 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. |
| But then you step back. And you begin to see it. |
| Your dark threads aren’t mistakes. They’re part of the design. The broken places aren’t flaws. They’re contrast that makes the bright threads shine brighter. |
| You step back further. And you see that your section connects to other sections. Your story is woven into other stories. The threads intertwine. |
| This isn’t just your tapestry. It’s part of something much larger. |
| And though you still can’t see the whole tapestry, you begin to glimpse the scope. It stretches back before you can see—to creation, to Eden, to the beginning of all things. And it stretches forward beyond your vision—to restoration, to the New Jerusalem, to eternity. |
| This is THE tapestry. The redemption story. God’s grand narrative into which every smaller story is woven. |
| And your threads—every joy and sorrow, every triumph and failure, every moment of grace and every season of struggle—are woven into the larger design. |
| Nothing is wasted. Nothing is random. Everything is part of the pattern. |
| One day—when the tapestry is complete, when the final thread is woven, when Jesus returns and all things are made new—you’ll see it. |
| The whole story. From creation to consummation. Every thread in its place. Every pattern intentional. |
| And you’ll see your story woven perfectly into His story. |
| This is redemption’s story. From the beginning, His love was displayed. Through every fall, His promise stayed. |
| And the story isn’t finished. He’s still weaving. Still making all things new. Still writing the redemption narrative that will one day culminate in complete restoration. |
| You’re part of that story. A beloved participant in God’s grand project to redeem and restore all of creation. |
| Forever redeemed. Forever His own. |
| # 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Nothing-is-Wasted-Remastered.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.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 |
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| ## Stories of Redemption |
| **Joseph: From Pit to Palace (Genesis 37-50)** |
| Joseph’s story is one of the clearest pictures of “nothing is wasted” in all of Scripture. |
| Betrayed by his brothers. Sold into slavery. Falsely accused. Imprisoned. For years, it looked like total waste. |
| But God was weaving a story of redemption. The pit led to Potiphar’s house. Prison led to the palace. And ultimately, Joseph’s suffering positioned him to save not just Egypt, but his own family—the very ones who betrayed him. |
| His words to his brothers capture the heart of “nothing is wasted”: |
| > “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 |
| What others meant for evil, God meant for good. |
| Not that God caused the harm. But that He redeemed it. He took what was meant for destruction and turned it into salvation. |
| Nothing was wasted—not the betrayal, not the slavery, not the false accusations, not the imprisonment. All of it was being woven into a story of redemption. |
| **The Cross: Ultimate Redemption of Waste (Luke 23:33-43)** |
| If you want to see God’s power to redeem waste, look at the cross. |
| The most brutal, degrading, seemingly wasteful death imaginable. A young rabbi, full of potential, executed as a common criminal. Three years of ministry, ended. Disciples scattered. Hope crushed. |
| Wasted. That’s what it looked like. |
| But that’s not what it was. The cross wasn’t waste—it was the hinge of history. The moment when all waste, all sin, all brokenness was gathered up and transformed. |
| > “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” > > — Colossians 2:15 |
| Death swallowed up in victory. The grave robbed of its power. |
| If God can redeem the cross—if He can take the most wasteful, brutal death and make it the source of eternal life—then nothing in your life is beyond His redemptive reach. |
| No season is too wasted. No pain is too great. No loss is too final. |
| In God’s economy, nothing is wasted. Not even death itself. |
| **The Wasteland Restored (Joel 2:25-27)** |
| After devastating judgment—locusts that destroyed everything—God makes a promise: |
| > “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm… You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you.” > > — Joel 2:25-26 |
| The years the locusts have eaten. The wasted years. The seasons of devastation and loss. |
| God doesn’t just stop the locusts. He repays. He restores. He redeems the wasted years. |
| This is the promise: no season is so wasted that God can’t redeem it. The years you think are lost—God will restore them. Not by turning back time. But by redeeming what was, transforming it, using it for His purposes. |

## 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 |
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| ## 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 |
| **[Verse 2]** I’ve walked through days that felt like silence And nights I couldn’t catch my breath I said I’d follow where You led me But I was scared of what came next I couldn’t see beyond the moment Still You whispered, “I am near” You never promised all the answers You only asked me not to fear |
| **[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 |
| **[Verse 3]** So here I am with hands wide open Letting go of what I thought was mine You never asked me for perfection Just a heart that says, “I’ll try” And in the breaking, I found healing In the loss, I found Your grace You’re the God who turns my ashes Into beauty I can’t replace |
| **[Bridge]** 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 |
| **[Final Chorus]** You will provide, You always do Even when I’m breaking in two Even when I walk through fire, You stay in the flame You never leave me alone in the pain In the valley, in the waiting, I have tasted In the economy of Your love, nothing is wasted |
| **[Outro]** So I lay it down again Even when I don’t understand You are good… and nothing is wasted You are near when I let go You are strong when I feel low You are kind… and nothing is wasted You’ve seen every tear I’ve cried Held my heart when hope had died You stayed… and nothing is wasted So I’ll trust You in the silence I’ll believe You through the dark You are faithful in the waiting You are healing every part I won’t fear what comes tomorrow I won’t chase what’s not mine to hold You are God… and 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.

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| ## 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? |

## Practice: The Timeline Exercise

Here’s how to do timeline work:

### 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. Don’t spiritualize everything.

### 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? Use another color to mark these moments.

### 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. Even the “wasted” years.

### 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.

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| ## 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. |
| Nothing was wasted. |
| Not the swamp. Not the struggle. Not the years of wandering. All of it—every single moment—was woven into the tapestry of your story. A tapestry of redemption. |
| You can see the ram in the thicket now. The provision that came at just the right moment. Not when you expected. Not how you imagined. But exactly when and how it was needed. |
| And you understand: this is who God is. The God who provides. The God who redeems. The God who ensures that in His economy, nothing is ever wasted. |
| You whisper the words that Abraham whispered centuries ago: “On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.” |
| And you know—deep in your bones, deeper than doubt, deeper than regret—it’s true. |
| God has provided. God is providing. God will provide. |
| And because of that, nothing you’ve experienced, nothing you’ve suffered, nothing you’ve lost is wasted. |
| It’s all raw material for redemption. All part of the story. All woven into the unforced rhythms of grace. |
| Nothing is wasted. |
| On the mountain of the Lord, provision is made. |
| And in the economy of God, nothing—absolutely nothing—is wasted. |
| # 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Devils-On-The-Run-III-Remix-Remastered-Remix.mp3)

**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 |
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| ## Stories of Spiritual Warfare |
| **Jesus’ Temptation in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11)** |
| Forty days. Forty nights. No food. No shelter. Just Jesus, alone in the wilderness—a barren landscape of stone and sand, scorching heat by day, bitter cold by night. The same wilderness where Israel wandered for forty years. The same kind of testing ground where God’s people failed again and again. |
| Jesus is hungry. Not the kind of hunger you feel when you skip lunch. The kind that makes your stomach cramp, your head swim, your vision blur. His body is screaming for food. Every stone looks like bread. And that’s exactly when the enemy shows up. |
| *“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.”* |
| If. That word is a knife. The Father just spoke at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my beloved Son.” But now the devil plants doubt: *If* you are… *If* God really loves you, why are you starving? *If* you’re really His Son, why doesn’t He provide? Prove it. Use your power. Take care of yourself. |
| Jesus’ response cuts through the fog of hunger with clarity: “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” |
| The second test shifts location—suddenly they’re at the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem, hundreds of feet above the ground. People below look like ants. The drop is dizzying. |
| *“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple.”* |
| Again, *if*. But this time the devil quotes Scripture—Psalm 91, God’s promise of protection. See? God will catch you. He has to. It’s promised. Test it. Prove it. Force God’s hand. |
| Jesus doesn’t flinch: “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” |
| The third temptation is the most brazen. The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in an instant—their wealth, their power, their glory. Everything Jesus came to redeem, offered as a shortcut. |
| *“All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.”* |
| No more *if*. Now it’s a straight-up offer: Skip the cross. Avoid the suffering. Take the kingdom now. Just bow. |
| Jesus’ final response is sharp, decisive: “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” |
| And the devil left. Fled. Ran. |
| This is the pattern for every believer. The enemy will attack your identity in Christ. He’ll offer shortcuts. He’ll tempt you to doubt God’s promises. |
| Your response? Stand on truth. Speak Scripture. Resist with confidence. |
| And he will flee. Just like he fled from Jesus. |
| **Peter Sinking (Matthew 14:22-33)** |
| The storm hits in the middle of the night. Wind howling. Waves crashing over the bow. The disciples are straining at the oars, trying to keep the boat from capsizing. They’re experienced fishermen—they’ve been through storms before. But this one is different. Relentless. Exhausting. And Jesus isn’t with them. |
| Then, in the pre-dawn darkness, they see something impossible: a figure walking on the water. Their first reaction isn’t faith—it’s terror. “It’s a ghost!” But then they hear His voice cutting through the wind: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” |
| Peter, impulsive as always, shouts back: “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” |
| “Come.” |
| One word. One invitation. And Peter—reckless, passionate Peter—climbs over the side of the boat. His foot touches the surface. And it holds. He takes another step. Still holding. He’s walking on water. Actually walking on water. |
| For a few glorious moments, Peter is doing the impossible. Eyes locked on Jesus. Faith overriding physics. |
| Then he notices the wind. Feels the spray of the waves hitting his legs. Hears the roar of the storm around him. His brain catches up with what he’s doing—*I’m standing on water, this is insane, I’m going to drown*—and the moment he shifts his focus from Jesus to the circumstances, he starts to sink. |
| Not slowly. Fast. Water up to his knees, his waist, his chest. Panic floods in. |
| And he cries out: “Lord, save me!” |
| Three words. Not a theological treatise. Not a confession of unworthiness. Not an apology for his lack of faith. Just a desperate, drowning cry. |
| And immediately—not after Peter proved himself, not after Peter had a better attitude, not after Peter pulled himself together and deserved it—immediately, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. |
| That’s the pattern. Not “get yourself together and then call on Jesus.” But “call on Jesus from the middle of your sinking.” |
| The enemy wants you to think you have to fix yourself before God will help you. But Jesus reaches out immediately when you cry out. |
| > “We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.” > — C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm* |
| **The Fall of Satan (Revelation 12:7-12)** |
| Picture the scene: war breaks out in heaven. Not a skirmish. Not a disagreement. War. Michael and his angels arrayed against the dragon and his forces. The ancient serpent, the one who deceived Eve in the garden, the accuser who has stood before God’s throne day and night bringing charges against His people—he thought he could win. |
| But he couldn’t. “He was not strong enough.” |
| > “Then war broke out in heaven… But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan… The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” > > — Revelation 12:7-10 |
| Not escorted out. Not gently removed. Hurled. Thrown down like a defeated enemy. The one who claimed to be like God, the one who promised Eve she could be like God, the one who has been accusing God’s children for millennia—cast out. Expelled. Defeated. |
| And the response of heaven? Not relief. Not cautious celebration. A victory shout: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah!” |
| The accuser is cast down. His accusations no longer stand. His authority is revoked. His place in heaven is gone. The victory is complete, cosmic, irreversible. |
| And the call to believers? |
| > “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” > > — Revelation 12:11 |
| You overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Christ’s finished work) and the word of your testimony (standing in truth). |
| Christ’s victory + your faith = the devil on the run. |

## 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.

The devil is on the run. Not because you’re strong, but because Christ is victorious.

And in Him, you share that victory.

| ## The Wayfarer Moment |
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| ## 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 |
| **[Verse 2]** In my darkest night I forgot the gift I had He pulled me low Told me lies and made me mad But even in the pit Jesus called my name Now I walk in light I’m not the same |
| **[Pre-Chorus]** Don’t be fooled By the snake in the weeds He don’t care ’Bout your hope or your needs He can’t give life Only takes what you earn He’ll torch it all Just to watch it burn |
| **[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 |
| **[Verse 3]** Chains are gone Yeah, the stone rolled back He lost the war On a bloodstained track Truth is fire And the lie won’t stand I’m a child of God With a sword in my hand |
| **[Chorus – repeat]** 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 |
| **[Bridge – Breakdown / Call & Response]** Oh the blood! Oh the Lamb! Crushed the devil With a mighty hand Ain’t no grave! Gonna hold me down! I’ve been bought And I wear the crown You can growl You can scream But you can’t run From the King Devil’s on the run— He lost everything |
| **[Final Chorus – Tag out strong]** 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 Yeah, the devil’s on the run Jesus won — and 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.

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| ## 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? |

## Practice: Truth Declarations

One of the most powerful practices for spiritual warfare is declaring truth over the enemy’s lies. Here’s how:

### 1. Identify the lie

What is the enemy whispering to you? What accusation feels most powerful? Write it down.

### 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. “Enemy, you say I’m not forgiven. But God’s Word says that if I confess my sins, He is faithful and just to forgive me. I am forgiven—completely, fully, eternally. Your lie has no power here.”

### 4. Stand firm

The lie will come back. That’s what the enemy does. But every time it returns, declare the truth again.

### 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. For the armor He provides. For the fact that in Christ, the devil is on the run.

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| ## 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. |
| And as you look across the battlefield, you see the truth: the devil is on the run. |
| Not because you’re powerful, but because Christ is victorious. Not because you fought hard, but because Jesus fought perfectly. |
| You can see him now—the enemy, scrambling, fleeing, powerless. All the lies exposed. All the accusations silenced. All the weapons stripped away. |
| He has nothing left. No authority. No claim. No ground to stand on. |
| And you? You’re standing in Christ. Clothed in His righteousness. Protected by His armor. Empowered by His Spirit. Living in His victory. |
| The battle isn’t to defeat the enemy. Christ did that at the cross. |
| The battle is to believe it. To stand in it. To live from it. |
| And when you do—when you really stand in the truth of Christ’s victory—the devil has no choice but to run. |
| Because he’s already beaten. Already disarmed. Already on the run. |
| And in Christ, you’re on the winning side. |
| You whisper the truth that’s become your anthem: “Jesus won. The devil lost. And I’m saved by grace.” |
| And the enemy, hearing that truth, does the only thing he can do. |
| He runs. |
| Every single time. |
| # 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](https://www.skylerthomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/This-Moment-is-Enough.mp3)

**Listen at:** http://go.skylerthomas.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:

**Where are you right now?**

Not physically. Mentally. Emotionally. Spiritually.

Are you here? Or are you replaying yesterday’s conversations you wish you’d handled differently? Rehearsing tomorrow’s scenarios that might never happen? Catastrophizing outcomes that probably won’t come to pass?

Be honest. Most of us live everywhere except the present moment.

We’re stuck in the past, replaying and regretting. Or anxious about the future, planning and preparing and trying to control outcomes that aren’t ours to control.

Never here. Never now. Always scattered across yesterday and tomorrow.

The cost of that is crushing. You’re exhausted from carrying regrets that belong to yesterday and borrowing worries from tomorrow. Your today is weighed down by burdens it was never meant to carry.

But here’s what I’ve discovered, and it’s the truth that brings rest:

**This moment is enough.**

Not because it’s perfect. Not because all your questions are answered or your problems are solved.

But because God’s name is “I AM”—present tense—and His grace meets you here, now, in this breath, in this step, in this exact moment you’re living.

This final chapter is about learning to be present. To live here, now, instead of scattered across time. 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.

You don’t need tomorrow’s grace today. You can’t access yesterday’s moments anymore. All you have—all you’ve ever had—is this moment.

And when you stop running from it and start receiving it as the gift it is, you discover something remarkable:

It’s enough.

So before you continue—this final time—pause. Actually pause. Be here. Consider:

*Can you say, even if it feels strange: “God, I’m here. Right now. Not yesterday, not tomorrow. Here. This moment is enough. Your grace meets me here. Help me stay present. Help me be here with You.”*

That’s the prayer that opens presence.

Because what comes next isn’t about doing more. It’s about being here—fully, completely, presently here—where grace has always been waiting.

Most of us live everywhere except the present moment.

We replay yesterday’s conversations, regretting what we said or didn’t say. We rehearse tomorrow’s scenarios, anxious about what might happen or what we’ll need. We carry the weight of past mistakes into today and borrow future worries to make today even heavier.

But we’re rarely here. Fully present. Fully alive to this moment.

And we wonder why we’re exhausted. Why anxiety feels constant. Why life feels like it’s always somewhere else—either behind us in regret or ahead of us in fear.

Living in the present feels like: - **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 |
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| ## Stories of Presence |
| **Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 1-3)** |
| In the beginning, God created humans and placed them in a garden. Not a palace with protocol and hierarchy. Not a temple with rituals and rules. A garden—soil under their feet, fruit on the trees, animals to name, work to do with their hands. Simple. Present. Alive. |
| Picture the scene: evening comes, the heat of the day fading. A breeze moves through the trees. And they hear the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden. Not a distant voice from heaven. Not a vision or a dream. Walking. Present. With them. |
| This is what humanity was made for: present-moment communion with God. No anxiety about tomorrow. No regret about yesterday. Just now. This moment. This conversation. This walk together. |
| But the serpent’s temptation was all about pulling them out of the present. “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Not today. Tomorrow. Not what you have. What you could have. Not contentment in this moment. Grasping for something more. |
| Eve looked at the fruit—pleasing to the eye, desirable for gaining wisdom—and she reached beyond the present moment. Reached for tomorrow’s wisdom today. Reached for knowledge God hadn’t given yet. Reached beyond simple trust. |
| And everything broke. Not just in that moment. In every moment after. |
| The story of redemption is, in many ways, God bringing us back to the garden. Back to simple presence. Back to walking with Him in the cool of the day. Back to this-moment trust instead of tomorrow’s anxiety. |
| **The Exodus and Daily Manna (Exodus 16)** |
| Every morning in the wilderness, the Israelites would wake to find the ground covered with something they’d never seen before. Thin flakes, white like coriander seed, appearing with the dew. They called it “manna”—literally, “What is it?” |
| The routine became sacred: rise early, before the sun gets too hot. Walk out of your tent with a container. Bend down. Gather. Enough for your family for today. Just today. |
| God’s instruction was explicit: “Each one is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.” Not more. Not less. Just enough. |
| Some people didn’t trust it. They gathered extra, hoarding manna for tomorrow just in case God didn’t show up again. But the next morning, they’d open their containers to find worms crawling through yesterday’s provision. It stank. Rotted. Useless. |
| The only exception was the day before Sabbath—then they could gather a double portion, and it would keep. Because God wanted them to rest, to trust that His provision covered even the day they didn’t work. |
| The lesson repeated six days a week for forty years: trust today’s provision for today. Tomorrow will have manna of its own. You don’t need to secure it now. You don’t need to hoard grace. |
| This is living in the moment. Not grasping for more than you need. Not anxiously securing tomorrow at the expense of today’s trust. Just receiving today’s grace with open hands, knowing tomorrow’s grace will be there when you need it. |
| **Jesus’ Temptation: Present Trust (Matthew 4)** |
| Forty days into His wilderness fast, Jesus is physically depleted. Hunger gnaws at Him. The stones scattered across the barren ground actually look like bread. His body is screaming for food, and He has the power to fix it—one word and those stones become loaves. |
| The devil’s first temptation is all about escaping the present moment’s discomfort: “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread.” |
| In other words: Why suffer now when you could solve this immediately? Why trust the Father’s provision when you have the power to provide for yourself? |
| Jesus’ response anchors Him in the present: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The Father’s word for this moment is: fast. Trust. Wait. So that’s what Jesus does. |
| The second temptation shifts tactics—this time the devil tries to get Jesus to force tomorrow’s provision into today: “Throw yourself down from the temple and angels will save you.” |
| Test God’s future faithfulness now. Make Him prove He’ll show up tomorrow by manufacturing a crisis today. |
| Jesus refuses: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Trust doesn’t demand proof. Trust waits for God’s timing, God’s provision, God’s way—not mine, not now, not on my terms. |
| The third temptation is the most blatant pull into the future: “Bow down and I’ll give you all the kingdoms.” |
| Everything Jesus came for—redemption, restoration, the kingdom of God—offered right now. Skip the cross. Bypass the suffering. Take the future today. |
| Jesus’ answer is decisive: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” |
| This moment’s call is worship and obedience. Not tomorrow’s shortcut. This moment. This trust. This faithfulness. |
| Every temptation was an invitation to abandon present trust for immediate relief, manufactured proof, or future shortcuts. And every response was Jesus choosing to stay in the moment, trusting the Father’s word for now. |
| This is the pattern: present trust defeats future anxiety. Moment-by-moment obedience overcomes the temptation to control what’s next. |

## 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 |
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| ## 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. |
| During a season of transition, when everything felt uncertain, a friend asked: “What do you need right now? Not tomorrow. Right now.” |
| I couldn’t answer. I’d spent so long living in yesterday and tomorrow that I’d forgotten how to be present to today. |
| “Maybe the question you need to ask isn’t ‘What’s going to happen?’ but ‘Is God’s grace enough for this moment?’” |
| I wanted to say yes. But honestly? I didn’t know if I believed it. |
| That’s when I began studying how God met people in their present moments throughout Scripture. Adam and Eve weren’t given tomorrow’s grace—they were given the garden that day. Abraham wasn’t promised the full picture—he was called to trust God in that moment of promise. Joseph wasn’t told the palace was coming—he was called to remain faithful in the prison. |
| The pattern was clear: God’s people have always been called to live in the present tense. To trust that today’s grace is sufficient for today. |
| “This Moment is Enough” emerged from this study. I wanted to trace redemption history through the lens of present-moment faithfulness—from the garden through the flood, Abraham’s yes, Joseph’s redemption, all the way to Jesus. And the refrain became my anthem: “We’re not promised tomorrow, only the breath we breathe. Here in this moment, God’s mercy never leaves.” |
| This isn’t resignation. It’s liberation. I’m not promised tomorrow. I don’t need tomorrow’s grace today. I just need this breath, this moment, this sufficient grace right here. When you live from that truth—when you really believe this moment is enough—anxiety loses its grip. You’re free to be fully present, fully here, fully alive to the grace that’s already present. |

## 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.

**[Verse 2]** Abraham walked with nothing in hand, Trusting the covenant, trusting God’s plan. Years went by, but His word held fast, A future was born from a simple “yes.” Faith is alive in the moment we live.

**[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.

**[Bridge]** 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.

**[Verse 3 – Final Verse]** Joseph was broken, then lifted again, From prison walls to the palace of men. What others meant for harm, God turned to grace, Forgiveness and mercy took sorrow’s place. Redemption is here in the moment we’re in.

**[Chorus – Final]** We’re not promised tomorrow, but love is here today. The God of all beginnings is guiding every step we take. From Genesis to Jesus, His story carries on— This moment is the promise, This moment leads us home.

**[Outro]** The story isn’t over, the story lives in us. This moment is a gift of grace— This moment is enough.

This moment is a gift of grace— This moment is enough.

| ## Key Takeaways |
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| ## Reflections for the Road |
| **Questions for the Journey:** |
| 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? |
| 4. **Read Luke 10:38-42 slowly—Mary and Martha.** Martha is distracted by preparations. Mary sits at Jesus’ feet, present and attentive. Jesus says, “Mary has chosen what is better.” Where are you being Martha right now? Too busy, too distracted, too productive to be present? What would it look like to choose Mary’s part—even for just one moment today? |
| 5. **How will you practice presence this week?** Not all the practices. Just one. Breath prayers throughout your day? Daily examen each evening? One tech-free meal where you’re fully present? A walk without headphones where you notice what’s here? Which one practice will you actually do? When will you start? What will you say no to in order to say yes to this practice? Be specific. Make it small. Make it real. |

## Practice: The Daily Examen

One of the most powerful practices for cultivating present-moment awareness is the Daily Examen. Here’s a simple version:

### 1. Become aware of God’s presence

Take a few deep breaths. Acknowledge that God is present with you right now. Thank Him for this moment.

### 2. Review the day with gratitude

Walk through your day from start to finish. Notice where you saw God’s presence. Where you experienced grace. What brought joy, peace, or connection.

### 3. Pay attention to your emotions

What moments stirred strong emotions—joy, anger, peace, anxiety? Don’t judge them. Just notice them. These are often clues to where God is at work.

### 4. Choose one feature of the day

Pick one moment that stands out. Sit with it. What was God doing in that moment? What was He inviting you to?

### 5. Look toward tomorrow

Not with anxiety, but with hope. What’s one thing you’re facing tomorrow? How do you want to respond? What grace do you need? Ask God for that grace. And trust that when tomorrow becomes today, the grace will be there.

## 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.

You remember the journey. The swamp. The water’s edge. The unforced rhythms. The deep roots. The redemption story. The promise that nothing is wasted. The truth that the devil is on the run.

All of it leading here. To this moment.

And you understand: every moment of the journey was preparation for this. For learning to be present. To trust. To receive this moment—just as it is—as enough.

Tomorrow will come. It always does. And when it arrives, it will bring its own grace, its own challenges, its own moments.

But you don’t need tomorrow’s grace today. You just need this moment’s grace. And it’s here. Sufficient. Complete. Enough.

You whisper the prayer that’s become your anthem: “This moment is a gift of grace. This moment is enough.”

And you mean it. Because you’ve learned the secret: God is the great I AM. Not I was. Not I will be. I AM.

Present tense. Here. Now. In this moment.

You take a breath—deep, full, grateful. And you step forward. Not into tomorrow. Into this moment. The only moment that’s actually yours.

And in this moment, you find everything you need: grace for this breath, strength for this step, love for this person, wisdom for this choice.

This moment is enough.

Not because it’s perfect. But because God is in it.

And God is always enough.

The journey continues. There are miles ahead. But you’re not walking them yet. You’re walking this step. Living this breath. Trusting this moment.

And this moment—this sacred, grace-filled, God-inhabited moment—is enough.

More than enough.

It’s everything.