

Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth

A Wayfarer's Journey Through Grace

By Skyler Thomas

With Original Songs and Devotionals

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Dedication

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

To those at the water's edge,
learning what it means to be washed clean.
And to those walking in unforced rhythms,
discovering that grace is not just sufficient—
it's everything.

This is your story too.

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

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

— Augustine

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

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

Are you soul tired? The kind of tired that sleep doesn't fix.

Do you lie awake wondering if there's more than this? Do achievements feel hollow? Relationships exhausting? Does the constant striving to prove you're enough never... quite... work?

If that resonates, keep reading.

Because I've discovered another way to live. Not perfect. Not easy. But different. Better. More real.

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

What This Book Really Is

Let me be honest: this is a book about finding something more. That "something more" is a spiritual connection—but probably not the kind you're thinking of.

This isn't about religion or joining a church. But yes, I'm going to talk about God. About Jesus. About ancient wisdom from the Bible. Because these texts and thinkers have mapped this journey before us.

If you've never been to church, you might have an advantage—fewer bad experiences to unlearn.

If you walked away years ago, I get it. The institution fails people. But this isn't about going back to what hurt you.

If you're not sure you even believe, stick with me. I'm not asking you to sign a statement of faith. I'm inviting 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?

Why "Spirituality" Not "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 a distant force or angry judge, but as the source of love you've been searching for. The kind that doesn't depend on your performance. That doesn't quit when you mess up. That runs toward you, not away.

I talk about Jesus not as a religious figure on stained glass, but as God stepping 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 us.

I talk about the Spirit as God's actual presence that can live in you. That whispers truth when you're believing lies. That gives strength when you have none. That transforms from the inside out.

Why would this matter to you?

Maybe you've tried everything else. Achieving your way to meaning. Working harder. Finding the right relationship. Filling the void with whatever you could find. Being a better person through sheer willpower.

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.

Augustine said it: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

That restlessness? That's not a flaw. That's your soul telling you there's something real to find.

The Crash

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

For me, it came in eight words: "I can't do this anymore."

Then my world crumbled.

It was more than burnout. It was 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 leader, husband, 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.

The Years of Performance

Everything looked right from the outside. Working hard. Mentoring. Serving community. Being a good family man. People looked to me as an example.

But underneath? Relationships fracturing. Conflicts I couldn't navigate. My boss pulled me aside: the dynamic wasn't working, and I was part of the problem. At home, tension you could feel before anyone spoke.

I was trying so hard. But internally? Drowning.

Then the facade crumbled.

And the institution 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, rejection.

So I walked away. Into the swamp of shame, isolation, and despair.

Henri Nouwen 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... Since the hole is so deep and your anguish so total, you run away from it, afraid that you will fall into it."

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— *Henri Nouwen, The Inner Voice of Love*

That abyss—I'd spent years trying to fill it with performance, approval, image-maintenance. But in the swamp, I was too tired to run. I had to look at it.

Face what I'd been avoiding.

Maybe you can't relate to my specific story. Your swamp might look different from mine.

Maybe yours didn't come from moral failure. Maybe it came from something quieter but just as destructive:

From performance exhaustion. You've been running so hard for so long—achieving, producing, meeting expectations, climbing the ladder—that you've lost track of who you are beneath the accomplishments. The mask you wear has become so heavy you can't remember what your real face looks like.

From cultural frenzy. The endless scroll. The comparison trap. The pressure to optimize every moment, monetize every passion, perform every relationship for an audience. You've been sucked into a pace of life that brings out the worst in you—the anxious, reactive, never-enough version of yourself.

From masking. You've spent years being what others needed you to be. The good employee. The reliable friend. The strong one who holds it together. And somewhere along the way, you stopped being you. You can't even remember what "you" felt like before you learned to perform.

From disconnection. Not from moral compromise, but from authenticity. You've been living a life that looks right on paper but feels wrong in your soul. You're successful and miserable. Connected and lonely. Functional and dying inside.

From sheer exhaustion of pretending. You're tired of the performance. Tired of managing impressions. Tired of saying "I'm fine" when you're not. Tired of living at a speed that never lets you actually feel anything.

Maybe your swamp isn't shame over what you've done. Maybe it's grief over who you've become—or who you've failed to become because you were too busy being what everyone else needed.

But perhaps you know the ending I know: wounded to the point of wanting out. Standing in wreckage that can't be put back together. Realizing that the life you've built—even if it looks successful—is crushing you.

That's still the swamp.

And this book is still for you.

That's where this journey begins. Not in victory, but in the swamp. Not with answers, but with honesty.

The Journey: Three Movements

This book follows three stages from performance to authenticity, from drowning to dancing, from swamp to sustainable life.

Movement 1: The Swamp

Where we're stuck. The quicksand of shame. Muck of failure. Waters of despair rising.

This isn't just depression or spiritual dryness. This is the accumulated weight of years performing instead of being. Hollow conversations. Service that felt like work. Community that felt like critique. Meaning that became burden instead of 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." — Psalm 69:1-2 (NLT)

Worn out calling for help. That's the swamp.

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 out of the swamp. Now you're at the edge of something clean. Living water. The kind that refreshes. Quenches real thirst.

But you're terrified to step in.

Why? Because you're filthy. Covered in swamp muck. You're convinced the water will reject you. That you need to clean up first.

This is where love does its most subversive work. Where you discover the invitation isn't "Clean yourself up and then come."

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

Movement 3: Unforced Rhythms of Life

Life after surrender. Not perfection, but participation. Not arrival, but walking.

An ancient invitation speaks to this:

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." — Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

Picture someone who's 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.

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.

The Songs as Waypoints

Each chapter centers on a song.

These aren't illustrations—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, listen first, read second. Let the music 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 songs are my psalms: imperfect, incomplete, but honest.

And honesty is where healing begins.

A Word About "Scandal"

When I say love is "scandalous," I mean it operates on principles that violate the economy we know—earning, deserving, performing, paying back. I'm not talking about scandal in the tabloid sense.

In every system humans create, love has conditions. But real love says: "I love you covered in swamp mud. I forgive you before you've proven you've changed. I call you 'beloved' when you're still a mess."

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

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

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

Here's the scandalous truth that changes everything:

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

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

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

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

And the voice said: This is holy ground.

The swamp becomes holy ground when you meet truth there.

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

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

While we were still.

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

While we were still.

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

The Wayfarer Identity

Who is a wayfarer? Someone on a journey, often weary. A pilgrim. A traveler.

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

Wayfarers know:

- The road is long and we're not there yet
- We'll walk through swamps, deserts, and dark valleys
- We don't travel alone
- The point isn't arrival; it's learning to walk authentically
- Questions are allowed, doubt is part of the journey
- We're all just beggars telling other beggars where to find bread

One teacher describes this 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

The Road Ahead

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.

But they know two things:

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

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

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.

The Wayfarer's Anthem: I can't do this alone. But I don't have to.

Let's walk together.

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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."

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— Ancient wisdom

The swamp is where honesty begins.

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

The swamp says: no more.

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

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

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

Love meets us in the swamp.

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

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

What This Movement Is About

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is where the journey begins.

The Shift: From Performance to Honesty

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

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

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

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

What You'll Discover in the Swamp

These two chapters will take you through the essential movements of crisis, honesty, and transformation:

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, crying out for help without pretense, and choosing to step toward the water's edge even when you're terrified.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/8o4Etw>

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, even angry or doubting conversation, is the language of authentic relationship with God. Prayer isn't performance; it's presence.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/swI2s8>

Chapter 3: 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. This is the theological hinge of transformation—the radical truth that almost dying changes nothing, but actual dying changes everything.

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

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

Entering This Movement

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

Movement 3: Unforced Rhythms of Life

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

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

MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

Chapter 1: My Swamp

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/8o4Etw>



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

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

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

The Geography of Disconnection

There's a moment you'll never forget: the moment you realize you're stuck.

Not busy. Not overwhelmed. Not in a season of challenge that will pass if you just hold on a little longer.

Stuck.

You've tried harder. Tried smarter. Tried therapy, self-help books, new habits, old habits, meditation apps, career changes, relationship changes, geographic changes. You've tried everything except admitting the one thing you know deep down: you can't fix this on your own.

And you're exhausted. Not just physically. Soul-tired. The kind of tired that sleep doesn't touch. The kind of tired that makes you wonder if there's something fundamentally wrong with you.

This is the swamp.

Not the dramatic crisis that makes headlines. Not the addiction, the affair, the arrest. Just the quiet, grinding desperation of a life that doesn't work no matter how hard you work at it. The relentless feeling that you're drowning in slow motion while everyone around you seems to be swimming just fine.

This is where the journey begins. Not with answers. Not with a roadmap. With recognition. I'm in the swamp. And I can't get out.

The Death of the Impostor

Who are you when no one's watching?

Not the curated you. Not the "I'm fine" you. Not the version you perform at work or church or family gatherings.

Who are you in the 3 AM darkness when the performance is over and you're alone with the truth?

The impostor is the false self we construct to survive. The mask we wear to earn approval, avoid rejection, maintain control. It's not entirely fake—it's built from real parts of who we are. But it's a performance nonetheless.

And performances are exhausting.

The swamp is where the impostor finally collapses. Where you can't maintain the illusion anymore. Not because you choose to let it go, but because you simply don't have the energy to keep it going.

"We cannot heal what we will not name."

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— Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*

The swamp forces the question: What if I stop pretending? What if I let people see the real me—the broken, doubting, struggling me? What if the person I've been trying so hard to be isn't actually who I am?

This moment is terrifying. Because if the performance ends, who's left?

But here's the mystery: this death of the impostor is the beginning of something real.

The Collapse of Self-Sufficiency

"I can handle this."

That's the mantra, isn't it? The quiet, relentless belief that if you just try harder, think smarter, work longer, you'll figure it out.

Self-sufficiency isn't weakness masquerading as strength. It's an entire worldview. The belief that salvation is internal. That rescue comes from within. That if you're drowning, the answer is to swim harder.

But what if you're sinking because you're trying to save yourself?

The swamp exposes the lie of self-sufficiency. It strips away the illusion that you're in control. That you can bootstrap your way to wholeness. That you just

need the right strategy, the right mindset, the right five-step plan.

In the swamp, you discover something both devastating and strangely liberating:

You can't save yourself.

Not because you're deficient. Not because you lack willpower or intelligence or discipline. But because self-rescue is a category error. It's like trying to lift yourself off the ground by pulling on your own shoelaces. The harder you try, the more exhausted you become.

This is where prayer becomes possible. Not the prayer of religious performance—"God bless this food, amen"—but the prayer of desperation. The honest cry: I can't do this anymore. If there's anything real out there, I need help.

The First Cry for Help

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

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

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

There's an ancient song—thousands of years old—that gives voice to this experience:

"I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death... You have thrown me into the lowest pit, into the darkest depths... Darkness is my closest friend."

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— Psalm 88 (NLT)

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

This kind of honesty is what healing prefers. Because honest conversation—even angry, doubting, or desperate—is still connection. Performance is isolation.

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."

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— 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.'"

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— 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."

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— Psalm 40:1-2 (NLT)

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

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

Burned out. Swamp-stuck. Performance-exhausted.

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

And He will give you rest.

The Wayfarer Moment

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

I did this for years. Someone would ask if I was okay and I'd have a hundred reasons why my situation was different, more complicated, not what it looked like from the outside.

The swamp doesn't announce itself. It creeps in. And somewhere along the way, you stop trying to get out and start trying to make it work. You get functional in the muck.

But there comes a moment when the defenses fall away and you're left with raw truth: This place was never meant to sustain life. And I can't keep pretending it does.

When I finally stopped defending and started admitting—I'm stuck. I'm drowning. I can't do this anymore—I discovered that honesty, even desperate honesty, is the language grace understands.

And Love? Love meets you there. In the muck. While you're still covered in it.

Song Integration

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

The opening verse names the impostor self with unflinching honesty: "I built these walls, I learned to fight, kept my heart locked up so tight... But I've been sinking all the while." This is the lament of someone who has maintained appearances while drowning inside. Like the psalms of lament, it refuses to sugarcoat reality.

The pre-chorus introduces the turning point—the voice calling through the night, pulling us higher, drawing us "out of the swamp, into the fire." This is transformative love that doesn't leave us where we are but calls us forward, upward, into something that will refine and purify.

The chorus is decision and declaration: "I won't stay where shadows grow... I'm stepping out, I'm choosing life." This is the moment of active response to grace. Not passivity. Not waiting to be rescued without participation. But choosing. Stepping. Rising.

Lyrics: I Will Rise

[Verse 1]

I built these walls, I learned to fight,

Chapter I: My Swamp

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

- The swamp is recognition, not failure. Acknowledging you're stuck isn't giving up; it's waking up. You can't address a problem you won't name.
- The impostor must die. The false self you've constructed to survive is exhausting. The swamp is where performance finally collapses—and real transformation can begin.
- Self-sufficiency is a lie. You can't save yourself by trying harder. Rescue doesn't come from within; it comes from beyond.

- Honesty is the native language of healing. Raw, desperate prayer—"I can't do this"—is far more powerful than religious performance.

Reflections for the Road

Questions for the Journey:

1. Where is your swamp? What's the stuck place you keep trying to fix but can't? Name it. Be specific.
2. Who's the impostor? What version of yourself are you performing? What would it cost to let that mask fall?
3. What would honesty sound like? If you prayed with complete honesty right now—no religious language, no performance—what would you say?
4. Can you admit powerlessness? Not as failure, but as truth. What would it feel like to say, "I can't do this alone"?

Closing Image

Picture yourself standing in the swamp. Mud up to your knees. The water murky. The air thick.

You've been trying to climb out for so long. Tried every technique. Read every book. Followed every strategy. And you're still here. Still stuck.

But now—for the first time—you stop trying.

Not because you're giving up. But because you're finally being honest.

You look up. Away from the swamp. Toward something you can't quite see but can somehow sense.

And you whisper: "Help."

It's not much. But it's real. And real is what transformation requires.

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.

And you whisper the only honest prayer left: "Help."

It's a beginning.

A Note Before We Continue

Let me be clear about something from the start: this book is about my journey through THE SWAMP.

Capital letters. The big one. The decade-long crisis that tried to take me down for good. The moral failure. The community rejection. The soul-exhaustion so deep I thought I'd never find my way out.

That's what you've been reading about and where this book continues.

But I'm also not going to pretend that once you work through this journey, you'll never struggle again. Life will bring other swamps—maybe monthly, weekly, sometimes daily. Moments when you're soul-tired again, when old patterns resurface, when you lose your footing.

But those aren't THE SWAMP. Those are the normal challenges of being human and learning to walk with God. And one thing we are promised, they will come, because... we... are... human.

Truth is, the things I learned about THE SWAMP are also just as relevant for our little swamps we face simply because we are human.

Maybe you think this book isn't for you because you're not in THE SWAMP. I think that wherever you are in your journey, there are things to be learned about how to handle whatever swamps we may face, BIG or little.

Let's keep walking.

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

MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

Chapter 2: But Then I Prayed

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/swI2s8>



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

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.

The Pattern of Reaching Out

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

First, we try to fix it ourselves. When that doesn't work, we try to manage it. We numb the pain, stay busy, medicate with work or Netflix or scrolling—whatever keeps the darkness at bay. When that stops working, we start bargaining. And finally—only finally—when we've exhausted every other option, we reach out.

But 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.

Swamp prayer doesn't look like mountaintop prayer. Mountaintop prayer is full of gratitude and joy, hands raised, voice strong. Swamp prayer is different:

- Groaning when words won't come
- Crying out instead of composing
- Complaining honestly instead of pretending piously
- Questioning reality instead of defending platitudes

There's an ancient song that gives voice to this:

"O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way?"

>

— *Psalm 13:1 (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 this kind of honesty:

"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.

Prayer as Surrender, Not Strategy

Here's what we get wrong: we treat prayer like a vending machine. Insert the right words, push the right button, and out pops the answer we want.

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

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

But: "I'm out of plans. I'm placing this in hands larger than mine because mine are empty."

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

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

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

Richard Foster writes:

"Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love."

>

— Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*

Prayer isn't about having the right words. It's about bringing our real selves—broken, desperate, honest—before what's Real.

The Turning Point: "But Then I Prayed"

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

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

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

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

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

The circumstances don't immediately change. But you change. You're no longer drowning silently. You're crying out. And crying out is the first act of defiance against the swamp.

Brené Brown writes about this kind of vulnerability:

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

>

— Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

This is what prayer in the swamp offers: the chance to be fully known—muck and all—and discover you're still loved.

The Wayfarer Moment

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

For so long, I thought I had to pray the "right" way. Thought God 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.

C.S. Lewis writes:

"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

"But Then I Prayed" captures the turning point: prayer is not religious performance but radical vulnerability before God. The phrase "but then" functions as the hinge between two realities—our powerlessness and God's presence.

The opening verse names the spiritual warfare of the swamp: "The night was long, the weight was strong, the shadows whispered, 'You don't belong.'" These whispers aren't merely self-doubt but the voice of the accuser. To name this darkness in prayer is to drag it into the light where its power diminishes.

The pre-chorus reveals the scandal of grace: "And in my sorrow, in my despair, I found Your presence waiting there." God doesn't wait for us to clean up before drawing near. He is "close to the brokenhearted." We find God's presence not despite our despair but within it. Love meets us in the muck.

The chorus testifies to how presence changes the equation: "But then I prayed, and You were near, Your voice of love cast out my fear." The circumstances don't change instantly, but experience shifts radically. When we experience God's love as personal reality, fear loses its tyranny. We're still in the swamp, but we're not alone in it.

"Your mercy came, Your grace remained" captures both the immediate and the ongoing. Mercy comes in crisis moments; grace remains through the long haul. The "chains were gone—You healed my pain" speaks to spiritual healing—the chains of isolation, shame, and pretense breaking. The pain of bearing burdens alone being lifted.

The repeated refrain "But then I prayed" creates a spiritual practice, training our hearts to run to God in crisis as our first response, not our last resort.

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.

Your love will hold, Your peace will stay,

Forevermore, I'll sing and say:

But then I prayed, and You were near,

Your light of hope erased my fear.

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.
- 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.
- The turning point is available now. You don't have to wait until you have perfect faith or understanding. "But then I prayed" can be your hinge moment today.

Reflections for the Road

Questions for the Journey:

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. What would you lose if you stopped performing "acceptable" prayers?

What part of your prayer life is for God, and what part is maintaining an image—for yourself or others?

4. How will you practice honest prayer this week?

Name one specific thing you'll stop editing out. One fear you'll name. One doubt you'll confess. One desperate need you'll actually admit.

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.

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.

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

MOVEMENT 1: IN THE SWAMP (The Struggle)

Chapter 3: Dying Changes Everything

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



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

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 illusions about how life works.

Key Themes

1. Death as Transformation

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

Here are the different kinds of death we experience:

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

Dallas Willard says:

"The greatest issue facing the world today is whether those who are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom."

>

— Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*

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

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

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

All of it—dead.

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

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

2. What Must Die: The False Self

Richard Rohr contrasts the true self (the person you were created to be) with the false self (the person you think you need to be to survive, to be loved, to matter):

"There is nothing to prove and nothing to protect. I am who I am and it's enough."

>

— Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*

The false self is built on what people expect, what earns approval, what feels safe, what maintains control.

The false self says: "If people knew the real me, they'd reject me." "I have to perform to be loved." "Vulnerability is weakness." "I am what I accomplish."

Thomas Merton understood this deeply:

"Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him."

>

— Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

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

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

3. Dying to Control, Certainty, Performance

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

Certainty is another. We want answers, not mysteries. Clear paths, not ambiguity.

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

All three have to die.

Dying to Control:

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

Dying to Certainty:

This is hard because we've been taught doubt is weakness. But clinging to certainty is the opposite of faith. Real trust requires living in the midst of mystery.

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

Dying to Performance:

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

Brennan Manning exposed this trap:

"My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it."

>

— Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

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

4. Why Resurrection Requires a Tomb

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

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

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

C.S. Lewis understood this paradox:

"Give up your self, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that

has not died will ever be raised from the dead."

>

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Deeper Truth

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. You've 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:

- "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. Each time we face a new swamp, a new layer of the impostor emerges that needs to die.

As we grow, we discover new layers of the false self that need to die. New illusions about reality that need to be shattered. New areas of control we must surrender.

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

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

The Wayfarer Moment

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

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

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

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 chorus—"Almost dying changes nothing, dying changes everything"—crystallizes the core teaching. This distinction is theologically crucial. Almost dying is flirtation with transformation without commitment. It's touching the edge of surrender but pulling back, acknowledging what needs to die but refusing to let it actually expire. And as the song declares, this changes nothing.

The chapter illustrates this through multiple frameworks: the death of the false self, the death of control, the death of performance-based identity. In each case, partial death is insufficient. The song's insistence on complete death echoes Paul's radical statement in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live." Not "I'm working on dying." Not "I'm mostly dead." But "I no longer live." This is total death, and only this kind makes resurrection possible.

This song serves as Movement One's climax because it names the hardest truth: transformation requires death—actual death of who we thought we were, what we thought we needed, how we thought life worked. And on the other side of that death, in the tomb, in the Saturday waiting, resurrection begins.

Lyrics: 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 You whisper
"Child, you will be found"

[Pre-Chorus]

Tick tock... time fades out
Your voice breaks through the doubt

[Chorus]

Almost dying changes nothing
Dying changes everything
I release the chains I'm clutching
Now I rise on eagle's wings
Spirit lifts me from the waters
Breath of heaven fills my lungs
In surrender I discover
New life rising with the Son

[Verse 2]

The veil is torn, the light is breaking
Your time has forever come
Flames of mercy burn around me
Pulling me to Kingdom's throne
Grace like lightning strikes my spirit
Love restores my heart again

No more running, no more hiding

I am free in Jesus' name

[Pre-Chorus]

Tick tock... time fades out

Your voice breaks through the doubt

[Chorus]

Almost dying changes nothing

Dying changes everything

I release the chains I'm clutching

Now I rise on eagle's wings

Spirit lifts me from the waters

Breath of heaven fills my lungs

In surrender I discover

New life rising with the Son

[Bridge]

I have crossed from death to life

You're the fire, You're the light

Nothing stands but Jesus Christ

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, faith has spoken

Night has turned to brighter day

I will sing of resurrection

Testify to what You've done

From the grave into Your glory

All my battles now are won

[Final Chorus / Tag]

Almost dying changes nothing

Dying changes everything

I am living in Your presence

Breathing heaven's holy breath

[Outro]

THUMP... thump... (heartbeat slows)

Tick... tock... time is gone

Eternal life has just begun

Jesus, You're my only song

Dying changed it all

Key Takeaways

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

Reflections for the Road

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Closing Image

The tomb. Silent. Dark. Waiting.

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

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

But the tomb is not the end.

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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."'"

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—John 7:37-38 (NLT)

A Moment to Consider

You've walked through the swamp chapters—naming it, crying out, making a decision, 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. Maybe you're standing at this water's edge thinking, "Is this 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. Just asking: Can you admit that maybe—just maybe—there's something real here? That the Voice you've been hearing might be worth following?

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. Your feet are heavy with swamp mud. Your clothes are soaked. 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—4 through 7—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 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 find bedrock truth

There's an ancient story about a woman who came to a well at noon—hiding from judgment, carrying shame. And she met someone 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: 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: 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.

The Journey at the Water's Edge:

Chapter 4: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/nXiDRV>

Chapter 5: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/wqg9eX>

Chapter 6: 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, that saved a wretch like me." 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/UCBWc5>

Chapter 7: 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. 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/i0kY88>

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.

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 back at the swamp.

You've come through Movement 1. 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.

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.

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.

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 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 who offered "living water." She tried to deflect. 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. The one who's afraid of being rejected. The one who's convinced there's not enough grace.

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 4: Living Waters Edge.

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

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

Chapter 4: Living Waters Edge

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/nXiDRV>



"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

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.

A Prayer of Invitation

You've walked through the swamp. You've named it. You've cried out for help. 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.

What Is Grace?

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.

But grace isn't religious. Grace is real.

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. Grace breaks that economy completely. 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."

Grace is love without conditions. Maybe you've spent your whole life trying to earn love. Be good enough. Smart enough. Successful enough. Grace doesn't work that way. Grace looks at you covered in swamp mud and says, "I love you. Right now. Exactly as you are."

Grace is power that transforms. Grace doesn't just accept you as you are—it makes you new. The water doesn't require you to be clean before you step in. But it also doesn't leave you dirty once you're in it. It washes. It cleanses. It transforms.

Grace meets you exactly where you are. But it loves you too much to leave you there.

Why do you need grace? Because you're human. You're broken. You're thirsty for something that nothing in this world can satisfy. You're stuck in patterns you can't break. You're exhausted from performing.

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

Grace is for you.

The Woman at the Well

There's an ancient story that captures this perfectly. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water at noon—the hottest part of the day. She comes alone because she's avoiding the other women. Her reputation precedes her.

Jesus is sitting at the well. He asks her for a drink.

She's shocked. Jewish men don't speak to Samaritan women. Ever.

But Jesus sees her. And He offers her something: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

She's confused. "You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"

Jesus replies: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but 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."

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."

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. And offers her living water anyway.

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

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

She leaves her water jar and runs back to town to tell 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 thirsty for water leaves having drunk from the source of living water.

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

The Threshold

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

You've left the swamp—made the decision, taken the first steps. 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.

Ahead of you: the unknown. Clean water that both attracts and terrifies you.

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. 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.

Running Toward Love

For years, I ran from God. I was 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 parts that didn't fit the image.

The swamp was awful, but at least I could hide there. At least the mud covered me.

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.

Because judgment I could handle. I'd been handling judgment my whole lives. Self-judgment, others' judgment, internalized shame—I knew what to do with that. I perform, I prove myself, I try harder.

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

Because if I'm loved as I am, then I have to stop performing. Stop earning. Stop hiding. And I didn't know who I'd be without all that.

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.

The Core Scripture

Centuries before Jesus, a prophet spoke this invitation:

"Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it's all free!"

>

— *Isaiah 55:1 (NLT)*

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

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

"On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, 'Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, "Rivers of living water will flow from his heart."'"

>

— *John 7:37-38 (NLT)*

"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me": Not anyone who's good enough. Not anyone who's cleaned up. Anyone who's thirsty. Are you thirsty? Then you qualify. That's the only requirement: thirst.

"Anyone who believes in me may come and drink": Come to Me. Jesus. Person. Presence. The source of living water. And drink. Receive. Stop trying to earn it and just receive it.

"Rivers of living water will flow from his heart": Not a trickle. Rivers. Not scarcity—abundance. Not external only. From within—internal transformation that flows outward. You don't just get washed on the outside. You become a source of living water yourself.

The invitation stands: "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink!"

Come to the water's edge. Come as you are—muddy, ashamed, broken, desperate. Come thirsty. And drink.

The Wayfarer Moment: Lake Hefner

For months—maybe years, if I'm honest—I'd been wrestling with unworthiness. Watching other people experience breakthrough, healing, transformation. 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?"

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. 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.



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.

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

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.

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.

"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.

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: "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.

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." The living water's edge isn't for the worthy. It's for the thirsty.

Lyrics: Living Waters Edge

[Verse 1]

Have you longed for a miracle, felt unworthy to believe?
Burdened down by guilt and shame, no hope to be relieved.
In the darkness, you have wondered, "Can I ever be made whole?"
Jesus stands with arms wide open, He's the Savior of your soul.

[Verse 2]

Have you seen a heart surrendered, healed by mercy's gentle hand?
Felt the joy of restoration, love you cannot understand?
Bring your pain and all your burdens; leave them at the cross tonight.
Let His power make you righteous, shining pure in holy light.

[Chorus]

Have you seen a miracle, felt His love that sets you free?
It's a gift beyond all measure, full of grace and majesty.
Come and drink the living water, let it wash your fear away.
Jesus breaks the chains that bind you; He's your miracle today.

[Verse 3]

Have you felt the weight of sorrow, like a chain you cannot break?
Every step feels weak and heavy, every move a deep mistake.
Jesus sees your every struggle, and He whispers, "You are Mine."
Through His grace, the chains will shatter; you will rise in love divine.

[Bridge]

Lift your hands and call upon Him; He will meet you where you stand.
Every tear and cry of sorrow, He will hold within His hand.
Feel the freedom in His presence, leave your past and walk His way.
Jesus loves you and redeems you; He's your miracle today.

[Verse 4]

Have you walked in endless darkness, longing for the morning light?

Felt the pain of isolation, thinking hope was out of sight?
Jesus calls you from the shadows; He will lead you by His hand.
Step into His glorious promise, to the life that He has planned.

[Chorus]

Have you seen a miracle, felt His love that sets you free?
It's a gift beyond all measure, full of grace and majesty.
Come and drink the living water, let it wash your fear away.
Jesus breaks the chains that bind you; He's your miracle today.

[Outro]

He's your miracle today,
Jesus is your miracle today.

Key Takeaways

- You don't clean up to receive grace; grace cleans you up. The water doesn't recoil from your mud—it washes it away. Come as you are, covered in swamp, and let the living water do what only it can do.
- Grace is scandalously free—and that's the point. You can't earn it, deserve it, or repay it. It's a gift for the thirsty, the broken, the stuck, and the exhausted—which means it's for you.
- Being fully known and fully loved is possible. The woman at the well discovered that Jesus sees everything and still offers living water. Transparency isn't rejection—it's the doorway to real relationship.
- The threshold is where obedience meets miracle. You have to get your feet wet before the water parts. Trust doesn't wait for risk to disappear—it steps in while the risk is real.

Reflections for the Road

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. Grace meets you where you are.

2. What's keeping you from stepping into the water? Fear? Shame? Unworthiness? The belief that you have to clean up first?

Name the obstacle. Shame loses its power when it's brought into the light. What's the lie you're believing about grace?

3. Read John 4 slowly. Put yourself in the woman's place. What does Jesus see in you? What does He offer?

This isn't theological study. This is personal encounter. Imagine yourself at the well. Imagine Jesus seeing everything you've ever done—and offering you living water anyway.

4. 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?

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 cup water and pour it over your arms. Watch the mud run off in brown streams. Underneath: skin. Your actual skin.

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

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.

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

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

Chapter 5: In the Shadow of Your Grace

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/wqg9eX>



"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." — Psalm 91:1



You've walked through several chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out for help, let something die, and stepped into living water.

But now I need to ask you something important:

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.

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.

Grace as Shelter, Not Escape

We often think of grace as removal from difficult circumstances. Take away the pain. Change the situation. Fix what's broken.

But the shadow of grace works differently.

The shadow doesn't remove the sun—it provides covering under it. Grace doesn't always eliminate the trial—it shelters us through it.

This is the scandal we don't want to hear: sometimes the answer to "Deliver me from this" is "I will be with you in it."

Consider Psalm 91:1-2:

"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him."

>

— *Psalm 91:1-2 (NLT)*

Notice the language: shelter, shadow, refuge, fortress. Not words of elimination—words of protection. A fortress doesn't remove the enemy; it protects you from the enemy. A shelter doesn't stop the storm; it covers you during it.

The psalmist is dwelling in the shelter, resting in the shadow. Not after the danger passes. Not once everything's resolved. In the midst of it.

This is where we learn the difference between comfort and presence. We pray for comfort—removal of difficulty. God often gives presence—companionship through difficulty.

The shadow of grace says: "I won't leave you in this alone."

Hiding IN God vs. Hiding FROM God

There are two kinds of hiding. Understanding the difference changes everything.

Hiding FROM is what the first humans did after they failed. Fear-driven. Shame-motivated. Trying to avoid being seen, known, exposed. This hiding isolates us, deepens our wounds, keeps us from the very healing we need.

Hiding IN is what ancient poets described in their prayers. Trust-driven. Safety-seeking. Running toward shelter for covering, not away in fear. This hiding heals, restores, connects us to our true identity.

The original writing from the blog captures this journey:

"What can wash away my shame, or will I live forever in its grip, squeezing the very life out of my soul, leaving me to rot on the heap of humanity? Have I walked too far beyond the boundary of grace, only to look back and see nothing but emptiness?"

This is the voice of someone hiding FROM. Convinced they've gone too far. Believing grace has limits.

But then the shift:

"But then I stop. I don't move in any direction. I bow down and listen. And I hear Your voice—just the whisper of Your voice—pleading with me to return, to simply turn around and walk."

From hiding FROM to hiding IN. From running away to turning around. From isolation to invitation.

In the shadow of grace, we don't hide our shame—we bring it into the light of covering. We don't pretend we're okay—we admit we're not and find that the shadow is big enough to cover all of it.

Hiding IN is a practice—a lifelong habit of running toward shelter, not away from it. We learn to live in the shadow now so that we know where home is when the final shadow falls.

Dwelling in the Shelter

Psalm 91 is the bedrock text for understanding shadow grace:

"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty... He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection."

>

— Psalm 91:1, 4 (NLT)

This isn't a one-time transaction. It's a posture. Dwelling. Resting. Living in the shelter, not just visiting it.

Notice the progression:

- Shelter (protective covering)
- Shadow (evidence of presence)
- Covering with feathers (tender, intimate protection)
- Faithfulness as shield (character as our defense)

The protection isn't mechanical—it's relational. Like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings, the covering isn't from a distance but with nearness, with tenderness, with the warmth of presence.

Pause and consider: What would it mean to dwell—not just visit, but live—in the shelter of what's Real?

Oswald Chambers writes:

"Never make the blunder of trying to forecast the way God is going to answer your prayer. God's way of answering prayer is infinitely more wonderful than our expectations."

>

— *Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest*

We expect God to remove the danger. He gives us His shadow instead—covering us in ways infinitely more wonderful than we imagined. Not escape, but presence. Not removal, but shelter.

Shadow as Evidence of Light

Here's the theological richness we often miss: shadow is proof of light.

You can't have shadow without a light source. The deeper the shadow, the brighter the light casting it. So when we talk about dwelling in the shadow of grace, we're acknowledging something profound: Reality itself is the light.

"The LORD is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?"

>

— *Psalm 27:1 (NLT)*

The shadow isn't absence of light—it's the shape light makes when it encounters the substance of divine presence. We rest in that shadow, and in doing so, we're closer to the light than we've ever been.

In the swamp, we couldn't see the light. The muck blocked it out.

At the water's edge, we discover the shadow. We're not yet walking fully in the light, but we're covered by it.

The shadow proves the light is real, present, strong enough to shelter us.

Learning to Rest

The blog devotional speaks to this:

"How do I trust after all these years? My shame is great, my faith is weak, and I'm tired. I heard You say, 'Come to Me, and I will give you rest.'"

Rest isn't passivity. It's trust. It's the active decision to stop striving, stop performing, stop trying to earn what's already been given.

Under the covering, we learn to:

- Stop running from the shame and bring it into the shadow
- Stop trying to be strong enough and admit we're weak
- Stop hiding our doubt and confess our questions
- Stop performing faith and simply receive grace

John Ortberg offers this insight:

"Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart."

>

— John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*

Resting in the shadow means unhurrying our hearts. Slowing down enough to notice we're covered. Sheltered. Held.

This is the kind of rest David wrote about:

"Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken."

>

— Psalm 62:5-6 (NLT)

Not in having everything figured out. Not in perfect circumstances. In God alone.

This is soul-rest. The kind that comes not from the absence of struggle but from the presence of God in the struggle.

Images of Shadow

Ruth Under Boaz's Wing

Ruth was a Moabite widow in a foreign land—no husband, no security, no legal protection. She gleaned in the harvest fields, working from sunrise, gathering scraps to keep herself and Naomi from starving. She was vulnerable. Exposed. A foreign woman alone.

Then Boaz, the field owner, noticed her and spoke this blessing:

"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.

And what happens? God provides through Boaz. Protects her. Covers her. Redeems her story completely—she 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.

The Cloud in the Wilderness

When God led Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, He didn't remove the wilderness. The desert was still scorching hot by day, bitter cold at night.

But God didn't leave them exposed:

"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."

>

— Exodus 13:21

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.

God didn't teleport them to the promised land. He walked them through the wilderness, step by step. But He never left them exposed. The shadow of His presence covered them every single day.

Jesus' Longing

Perhaps the most heartbreakng image comes from Jesus Himself:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem... 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

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.

This is the heart of God. Longing to gather us. Aching to cover us. Willing to take the wounds so we can be sheltered.

The shadow is there. The wings are spread. Will we come?

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

Standing in full sunlight at the height of my spiritual crisis, I wasn't basking in illumination—I was burning from exposure. Every wound visible. Every failure on display. This is the paradox the comfortable never understand: sometimes the problem isn't darkness. Sometimes the problem is too much light—too much exposure, too much harsh truth without any corresponding shelter.

"In the Shadow of Your Grace" emerged from that scorched place. From discovering what I needed wasn't escape from reality but shelter within it.

Western Christianity tends to emphasize victory, breakthrough, deliverance—mountains moved, trials removed, circumstances changed. But more often in the actual lived experience of faithful people, God doesn't remove the trial. He provides presence within it. Not escape, but shelter. Not deliverance from, but companionship through.

Psalm 91 establishes this theology: "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." Dwelling—not visiting, not dropping by in crisis, but making your home. The psalm doesn't promise the absence of "the terror of night" or "the arrow that flies by day." These threats are real and present. The promise is covering, not elimination.

This is the scandal modern Christianity often tries to soften: following Jesus doesn't guarantee exemption from suffering. It guarantees we won't suffer alone.

The song tracks a transformation: from fear-based hiding to faith-based hiding. From running away to running toward. "I've been running, I've been hiding, worn out from the fight." This is Genesis 3 hiding—afraid of being seen. When shame drives hiding, we hide from exposure because we believe being fully known means being fully rejected.

But the song pivots: "But You call my name, You take the weight, You step right into my mistake." God doesn't wait at a safe distance for us to clean up. He steps into the mistake. Into the mess. "You tear the veil, You light the way"—referencing the temple veil torn at Christ's crucifixion (Matthew 27:51).

The chorus declares: "Oh, in the shadow of Your grace, every fear begins to fade." Not "instantly disappears" but "begins to fade." Shadow grace is a process. "Where mercy meets me face to face, I am free, I'm not the same!" This is the paradox: in the shadow, somehow we're face to face. The shadow isn't distance from the light source—it's proximity to it. You can only be in someone's shadow if you're close enough to be covered by them.

The shadow of grace teaches crucial truths: Proximity matters more than circumstances. Shelter is a form of deliverance—not from the circumstance but from facing it alone. And the shadow is evidence of light, not absence of it. In that shadow, transformation happens. Not because you're striving but because you're dwelling.

Lyrics: In the Shadow of Your Grace

[Verse 1]

Your grace has lifted me from shame,

Restoring hope, erasing blame.

Your mercy shines, my heart is new,

Forever, Lord, I'll worship you.

[Chorus]

Grace, grace, God's grace,

Lifting the burden, the weight erased.

Grace, grace, unending grace,

Love that restores and fills this place.

Oh, Your grace, grace, God's grace,

Stronger than sin, forever the same

[Verse 2]

You bore my burden, healed my pain,

Your sacrifice has broken chains.

Through every storm, Your love remains,

I lift my voice in endless praise.

[Bridge]

In the shadow of grace, I find my rest,

Your whisper calms the chaos, the test.

"Come to Me," You softly say,

"I'll take your burden; I'll lead the way."

[Chorus]

Grace, grace, God's grace,

Lifting the burden, the weight erased.

Grace, grace, unending grace,

Love that restores and fills this place.

Oh, Your grace, grace, God's grace,

Stronger than sin, forever the same

[Verse 3]

Your grace, a light that leads my way,

It fills my soul with joy each day.

No greater gift could there ever be,

Than grace that flows eternally.

[Verse 4]

Oh, Lord, You've written my name above,

Clothed me in mercy, wrapped in love.

With every breath, my song will rise,

Your grace, my anthem, never dies.

[Chorus]

Grace, grace, God's grace,

Lifting the burden, the weight erased.

Grace, grace, unending grace,

Love that restores and fills this place.

Oh, Your grace, grace, God's grace,

Stronger than sin, forever the same

[Outro]

There's hell on Earth in separation,

But Heaven comes in Your salvation.

Grace that pardons, grace that frees,

Grace that's calling, even me.

Grace, grace, God's grace,

Greater than all my sin and disgrace.

I'm alive in Your name.

Your grace, my anthem, never dies.

Key Takeaways

- Grace shelters, not just rescues. God doesn't always remove the trial, but He covers you through it. The shadow doesn't eliminate the sun—it provides protection under it.
- Hide IN God, not FROM God. Running toward shelter is faith; running from exposure is fear. Bring your shame into the shadow of grace where it's covered, not hidden.
- Shadow is proof of light. You can't have shadow without a light source. Resting in God's shadow means you're closer to His presence than you've ever been.
- Dwelling is different from visiting. Psalm 91 invites you to live in the shelter, not just stop by in crisis. Make presence your primary residence, not your emergency contact.

Reflections for the Road

Questions for the Journey:

1. Where are you seeking escape when God might be offering shelter?

What trial are you begging to have removed? What if, instead of removing it, you're being invited to experience presence in it? How might that shift your prayer?

2. Are you hiding FROM or IN?

Be honest: What are you afraid will be seen if you come close? What shame are you carrying that keeps you at a distance?

Remember: The shadow of grace is for the ashamed. The broken. The weary. Come as you are.

3. What does dwelling (not just visiting) in shelter look like for you?

Psalm 91 talks about dwelling—making your home—in shelter. Not dropping by when you need something. Living there.

What would change if you made presence your primary residence instead of your emergency contact?

4. Read Psalm 91 slowly. Which verse speaks most to where you are right now?

Don't rush through it. Let each image sink in. Shelter. Shadow. Refuge. Fortress. Wings. Covering.

Which one makes you want to weep? Which one makes you want to rest? That's probably the one you need to sit with today.

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.

\pagebreak

Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 6)

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

Chapter 6: Amazing Grace I Did Receive

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/UCBWc5>



"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

You've walked through several chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out, died to the old, stepped into the water, and discovered grace shelters you.

But here's a question that might make you uncomfortable:

Do you really 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 to deserve what you're receiving.

Part of you is still trying to earn it.

And that's the problem. Because what comes next can't be earned. Can't be deserved. Can't be worked for.

It can only be received.

Grace says: "You're getting this for free, and there's nothing you can do about it." No performance required. No goodness quota. Just... receiving.

Can you let go of trying to deserve it? 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. But someone who absolutely doesn't deserve it.

A wretch, in fact.

And grace says: "That's exactly who this is for."

Can you say, even if it feels scandalous: "God, I don't deserve this. I can't earn it. But I'm opening my hands to receive it anyway. Amazing grace—for a wretch like me."

You know the feeling when you realize you've been given something you absolutely don't deserve?

Not a small gift. But something so extravagant, so unearned, so wildly disproportionate that it stops you in your tracks.

That's grace.

And here's what makes it 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.

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 do not.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

Not a mostly-good person. A wretch.

The Scandal of Grace: For the Undeserving

Grace is scandalous precisely because it's for people who don't deserve it. If you deserved it, it wouldn't be grace—it would be payment. A transaction.

But grace isn't a transaction. It's a gift. Freely given to those who can never earn it, never repay it, never deserve it.

This offends us. Because we've been trained to believe you get what you earn. Work hard, get rewarded. Mess up, face consequences.

But grace shatters that entire system.

"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."

>

— *Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*

Not by works. Not by trying harder. By grace. Through faith. A gift.

There's a story about a prophet who received a clear call from God but fled in the opposite direction. He thought he could outrun God, create his own path. This is our human condition—we hear what's true, but we think we know better. We convince ourselves that our version of freedom will bring fulfillment.

That path led him into the belly of a fish, trapped in the very darkness he'd been trying to escape. In that belly, in that darkness, he cried out from the grave of his own making.

And God answered.

That's the scandal. God doesn't wait for us to deserve rescue. He rescues us while we're still in the belly of the whale.

Philip Yancey writes:

"Grace is the most dangerous, revolutionary, unexpected, and free force the world has ever seen or will ever see."

>

— Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*

Grace is dangerous precisely because it refuses to play by our rules. It doesn't wait for worthiness. It doesn't demand payment. It just gives—freely, scandalously, outrageously.

Trading True Freedom for False Freedom

The blog writing captures this:

"I traded it in for my version of freedom / Ruling others from my own throne / Instead of following the Master's plan / I wrote one of my own."

We think freedom means autonomy. No rules. No boundaries. We sit on our self-made thrones and convince ourselves we're liberated.

But autonomy isn't freedom. It's slavery in disguise.

When we attempt to rule our own lives, we don't escape constraints—we just exchange life-giving boundaries for soul-crushing bondage. We become enslaved

to our appetites. Our pride. Our need to control.

The freedom we think we've found leads us down a dead-end road.

Jesus says in John 8:36:

"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free."

>

— *John 8:36 (NLT)*

Not freedom to do whatever we want. Freedom to become who we were created to be. Freedom from the tyranny of self.

Timothy Keller captures this paradox:

"The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time."

>

— *Timothy Keller, The Prodigal God*

True freedom isn't found in ruling our own throne—it's found in bowing before the only One who died to set us free.

From the Grave to the Water's Edge

The progression in the writing:

- "The freedom I was living / Turned out to make me a slave"
- "Rather than bringing life to me / It buried me in my own grave"
- "He led me down a dead end path / So He could show me His vision"
- "It stopped way short of the water of life / And I had to make a decision"

God doesn't usually intervene the moment we start running. He lets us run. Lets the path we've chosen reveal its true nature. Lets us reach the dead end.

Not because He's cruel. Because that's when we're finally ready to listen.

As long as we think our path might work, we won't turn around. But when we hit the wall, when the road dead-ends—that's when grace becomes not just nice but necessary.

And at that dead end, there's a choice: turn around or stay buried.

The water of life is right there. Close enough to see. But there's a gap between the dead-end road and the water's edge. And crossing that gap requires a decision.

The Decision: Fleeing or Embracing

"Would I turn around and walk away / Fleeing from the water's edge / Or would I leave my road and run to Him / Embracing His freedom pledge"

This is the hinge moment. Everything comes down to this choice.

Grace is offered. The water is there. The invitation is extended. But grace must be received. We have to choose to step toward it.

God doesn't force us. He invites. He calls. He stands at the water's edge with arms open. But He waits for us to come.

Why? Because love that's forced isn't love.

The wayfarer makes the choice: "I stepped off that dead end road / And simply trusted He would save."

Notice the word: simply. Not "I cleaned myself up and then approached." Simply trusted.

That's all grace requires. Not perfection. Not performance. Just trust.

The Lifting: God's Hand Raises Us

"With each step I took, I felt His hand / Lifting me out of my grave"

This is the miracle. We step toward the water, and God's hand meets us. We take one step of faith, and He carries us the rest of the way.

We don't pull ourselves out of the grave. We can't.

But when we trust—when we simply turn toward the water and step—God's hand reaches down and lifts us out.

"But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)"

>

— *Ephesians 2:4-5 (NLT)*

Made us alive. Not "helped us get a little better." Made us alive.

That's resurrection language. That's grace language.

Costly Grace, Not Cheap Grace

Whenever we talk about grace being free and unearned, someone objects: "But doesn't that make grace cheap?"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer addressed this. He distinguished between cheap grace and costly grace.

Cheap grace is grace without transformation. Grace as a Get Out of Jail Free card that you pocket and go back to your old life.

Costly grace is grace that costs God everything—the life of His Son—and costs us everything too. Not to earn it, but as a response to it. When you truly encounter grace, it doesn't leave you unchanged. It transforms you.

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has."

>

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

The grace at the water's edge is costly—not in what we pay to receive it, but in what it cost Christ to offer it, and in how completely it transforms us.

The Prodigal Son: From the Pigpen to the Father's Embrace

Jesus told a story about a younger son who demanded his inheritance early (essentially wishing his father dead), left home, squandered everything, 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 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.

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.

Henri Nouwen 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."

>

— Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

The son comes home to be a servant. The father makes him a son. That's grace.

The Wayfarer Moment

When grace stops being doctrine and becomes your story.

You can know the theology of grace and still not experience grace.

Because grace isn't just a doctrine. It's an encounter.

The wayfarer moment is when you stop understanding grace in the abstract and start experiencing it in the specific. Not just "God loves the world" but "God loves me." Not just "Jesus died for sinners" but "Jesus died for me."

The writer of the blog wasn't learning about grace for the first time. They'd grown up knowing the truth. But they'd trampled on that gift. Traded it for autonomy. And ended up in a grave of their own making.

The wayfarer moment came when they stood at the dead end of their self-made road and heard the whisper: "Turn around. The water is here. Just trust Me."

And they did. One step. Then another. And with each step, they felt God's hand lifting them out of the grave.

That's when grace stopped being a hymn they sang and became their testimony.

I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see.

Not theological theory. Personal history.

Song Integration

"Amazing Grace" emerged from standing at that dead-end road, the place where my false freedom had led me into bondage. The chapter walks through the theological framework—grace for wretches, trading autonomy for surrender, the choice at the water's edge—and the song gives voice to what that moment feels like when grace stops being doctrine and becomes your story.

The opening verse captures the chapter's core truth: "Your grace, how sweet the sound / It called me when I was bound." This is the scandal of grace—it doesn't wait for you to clean up, get better, or deserve it. Grace calls you while you're still bound. The chapter teaches that we trade true freedom for false freedom, thinking autonomy will liberate us, only to discover we've enslaved ourselves.

The song names this reality: "when I was bound." Not free. Bound. And grace is what calls into that bondage.

The chorus—"Your amazing grace has set me free / It took away the chains on me"—is the testimony of someone who stepped off the dead-end road and ran to the water's edge. The chapter asks the question: will you flee from the water or embrace it? The song answers: I embraced it, and the chains came off. Not through my effort, but through His grace. "You called my name, I heard Your voice"—this is the personal encounter, the moment grace stops being abstract theology and becomes the voice that knows your name, calls you beloved, and sets you free.

Verse 2 moves deeper into the substitutionary nature of grace: "You bore my shame, You took my sin / And gave me life, a hope within." The chapter discusses costly grace—grace that cost Christ His life. The song personalizes this: You bore MY shame. You took MY sin. This isn't generic grace; it's grace that reaches into the grave you've dug for yourself and lifts you out. The result? Not just forgiveness, but transformation: "Your love has claimed me as Your own / I stand redeemed before Your throne." This is the movement from wretch to beloved, from grave to grace, from slave to child.

The bridge makes explicit what the chapter has been building toward: "You called me child, You made me whole." Grace doesn't just forgive—it adopts. It doesn't just pardon—it transforms. The chapter warns against cheap grace that leaves you unchanged. This song is about costly grace that remakes your identity. Not "you're forgiven, now try harder," but "you're My child, you're whole, you're Mine." And the only proper response? "Forever I'll sing, forever proclaim / Your grace, Your mercy, Your holy name."

This song is the sound of someone who has been lifted out of the grave by God's hand. It's the testimony of costly grace received, the freedom pledge embraced, the water's edge crossed. Where the chapter teaches the theology, the song sings the testimony. And together they proclaim: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound—it saves wretches like us.

Lyrics: Amazing Grace I did Receive

[Verse 1]

Oh, Your grace, how sweet the sound
It called me when I was bound
Your mercy reached into my night
And led me home into Your light

[Chorus]

Your amazing grace has set me free
It took away the chains on me
You called my name, I heard Your voice
Now I'm Yours, my heart rejoice

[Verse 2]

You bore my shame, You took my sin
And gave me life, a hope within
Your love has claimed me as Your own
I stand redeemed before Your throne

[Chorus]

Your amazing grace has set me free
It took away the chains on me
You called my name, I heard Your voice
Now I'm Yours, my heart rejoice

[Bridge]

You called me child, You made me whole
Your love has healed and saved my soul
Forever I'll sing, forever proclaim
Your grace, Your mercy, Your holy name

[Outro]

Oh, Your grace, how sweet the sound
Once lost, but now I have been found

Forever I'll sing, forever proclaim
Your grace, your mercy, your holy name
[Refrain]
Oh, Your grace, how sweet the sound
Once lost, but now I have been found
Forever I'll sing, forever proclaim
Your grace, your mercy, your holy name

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.
- 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.
- Your dead-end road is grace's invitation. When your self-made path stops short of living water, step off and run toward it.

Reflections for the Road

Questions for the Journey:

1. Where are you trading true freedom for false freedom?

What self-made throne are you sitting on? Where are you writing your own plan? Be specific. Name it.

2. What dead-end road has life let you travel?

Where has your path dead-ended? And what is being shown to you from that vantage point?

3. What's keeping you from stepping toward the water's edge?

Is it shame? The belief that you've gone too far? Name the obstacle.

4. Read Luke 15:11-32 slowly. Put yourself in the prodigal's place.

Imagine standing far off, still in your filth, rehearsing your apology. And then imagine seeing the Father running toward you with arms open. What would that do to your heart?

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'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.

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Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 7)

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

Chapter 7: Dig a Little Deeper

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/i0kY88>



"They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream." — Jeremiah 17:8

An Invitation to Go Deeper

You've journeyed through six chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out, 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 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.

To heal that wound, you have to open it again. You have to cut through the scar tissue, drain the toxins, let air and light reach the infection that's been festering in the dark.

You can't numb this. Real healing requires you to feel. To face. To dig.

The writing that follows came from my season of excavation. When I discovered that time doesn't heal all wounds—it just buries them deeper. The only way to true healing was through the pain I'd been avoiding for years.

Grace doesn't just wash the surface. Grace goes deep. All the way down to the bedrock truth of who you are beneath the wounds, beneath the scars, beneath the lies you've believed about yourself.

But you have to let it.

You have to dig.

Key Themes

1. The Depths of Grace: How Wide, How Long, How High, How Deep

The Apostle Paul prays one of the most beautiful prayers in Scripture in Ephesians 3:

"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

>

— Ephesians 3:18-19 (NLT)

How wide? Wide enough to reach every person. No one is outside the reach of this love.

How long? Long enough to span eternity. This love has no beginning and no end.

How high? High enough to lift us from the lowest pit to the highest heights.

How deep? Deep enough to reach the deepest wound, the darkest shame, the most hidden brokenness.

Grace doesn't skim the surface. It goes all the way down. Down to the root. Down to the original pain. Down to the place you've been protecting because you're terrified that if anyone sees it, you'll be rejected.

But grace isn't afraid of your depth.

Grace dives. Grace excavates. Grace says: "Show me the wound. I know how to heal it."

Philip Yancey writes:

"Grace, like water, flows to the lowest part."

>

— Philip Yancey, The Jesus I Never Knew

Grace doesn't wait at the surface for us to climb up. It descends—all the way down to the lowest, darkest, most wounded places.

That's where grace does its deepest work.

2. Spiritual Formation as Excavation, Not Construction

We tend to think of spiritual growth as building something. Adding disciplines. Improving behavior. Constructing a better version of ourselves.

But that's not how it works.

Spiritual formation is more like archaeology than architecture. Excavation, not construction.

You're not building a new self from scratch. You're uncovering your true self—the image of the Divine that's been buried under layers of wounds, lies, and false beliefs.

Dallas Willard writes:

"Actions are not impositions on who we are, but are expressions of who we are. They come out of our heart and the inner realities it supervises and interacts with."

>

— Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart

Who you are at the core—created in love's image, beloved, chosen, redeemed—is already true. But it's buried.

Digging deeper means removing what doesn't belong so the truth can emerge.

Think of a sculptor chipping away marble to reveal the statue that's been there all along. The sculptor doesn't create the statue from nothing. The work is removing everything that isn't the statue.

That's what digging deeper does. It removes the false beliefs, the protective layers, the scar tissue—not to create something new, but to reveal what's always been true underneath.

Thomas Merton understood this:

"There is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace, and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him."

>

— Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

3. Digging Through the Layers

The journey inward follows a pattern:

Layer 1: Performance

On the surface, we perform. We present the version of ourselves we think will be acceptable. We wear masks. Manage impressions. Work hard to look good, sound good, appear to have it together.

This is exhausting. Performance is never finished.

Layer 2: Shame

Underneath performance is shame. The voice that says: "If they really knew me, they'd reject me. If they saw the real me—messy, broken, failing—they'd turn away."

Shame is what drives performance. We perform because we're ashamed of what we think people will see if we stop.

Layer 3: Wounds

Underneath shame are the wounds. The things that happened to us. The ways we were hurt, betrayed, abandoned, abused. The traumas, large and small, that marked us.

Wounds aren't our fault. They're what was done to us. But they shape us. They create patterns of response that become automatic.

Layer 4: False Beliefs

Underneath the wounds are the false beliefs. The conclusions we drew from the wounds about ourselves, about others, about reality.

"I'm not good enough."

"Every statement is a criticism."

"Responses are always taken the wrong way."

"I have to be intense or I won't be taken seriously."

"If I'm not perfect, I'll be abandoned."

These beliefs formed in moments of pain. And they've been running our lives ever since.

Layer 5: Bedrock Truth

All the way down, beneath all the layers, is the bedrock truth:

You are loved. You are worthy. You are enough. You are beloved.

This truth was true before the wounds. It remained true through the wounds. And it's true now, underneath all the layers.

Digging deeper means excavating through performance, shame, wounds, and false beliefs until you hit bedrock.

4. Finding Treasure Buried in the Depths

Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 13:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field."

>

— Matthew 13:44 (NLT)

The treasure is there. Already in the field. The work isn't creating the treasure—it's finding it.

Once you find it, you'll give up everything to possess it. Not out of obligation. Out of joy.

That's what digging deeper does. It helps you find the treasure that's been there all along—your true self, your real identity, the image of love in you.

The performance? Exhausting. Let it go.

The shame? A lie. Let it go.

The false beliefs? Not bedrock. Let them go.

What remains is who you've always been, underneath: Beloved.

5. Surface Religion vs. Deep Transformation

Jesus had no patience for surface religion. He called out the religious leaders repeatedly:

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too."

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— Matthew 23:25-26 (NLT)

Surface religion focuses on the outside: behavior, appearance, performance.

Deep transformation focuses on the inside: the heart, the motives, the beliefs that drive behavior.

You can clean up your behavior without touching your heart. You can look like a "good person" on the outside while still being driven by shame, fear, and false beliefs inside.

Paul captures this in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

"So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image."

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— 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

Transformation. Not behavior modification. Not surface cleaning. Transformation from the inside out.

And it comes not from our striving but from beholding. From contemplating Love's glory with unveiled faces—no masks, no performance.

A.W. Tozer writes:

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

>

— A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

When we behold rightly, we cannot remain unchanged.

Stories of Digging Deeper

Isaac Re-Digging the Wells (Genesis 26:18)

Isaac is living in the Negev, the dry southern desert. Water is life here—without wells, there's no survival.

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. Hauled dirt and rocks, stopped up the openings, buried the sources.

Isaac could have left. Could have said, "The wells are gone. I'll start somewhere else."

But he didn't:

"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."

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— 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.

This is the work of excavation. The well was dug. Your true identity was established. The truth about you was set.

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.

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.

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.

So she comes when no one else is there.

Except today, there's a Jewish man sitting by the well. And He speaks to her.

The conversation starts surface-level:

Woman: "You're a Jew. I'm a Samaritan. Why are you even talking to me?"

But Jesus 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. 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. But Jesus goes even deeper:

Jesus: "Go call your husband."

There it is. The question she dreads.

Woman: "I don't have a husband."

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.

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.

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.

The Wayfarer Moment

Grace on the surface is wonderful. Grace in the depths is life-changing.

You can experience grace on the surface. You can know you're forgiven. You can feel the relief of being washed. You can taste the living water.

But if you never dig deeper—if you stay in the shallows, protecting the depths—you'll miss the fullness of what grace offers.

Because grace doesn't just want to clean you. Grace wants to heal you. And healing requires depth.

The wayfarer moment in this chapter is the moment you decide:

I'm not going to keep protecting this wound. I'm not going to keep numbing this pain. I'm not going to keep living with scar tissue that fools me into thinking I'm healed when I'm just covered up.

I'm going to dig. Open the wound. Let it drain. I'm going to invite healing into the deepest, most protected places and trust that grace is sufficient even there.

Take a breath.

This is terrifying. Because what if the wound is too deep? What if the pain is too much?

But here's the promise: you don't dig alone. Love is the excavator. It has the skill to go deep without destroying you. It knows exactly how deep to dig and exactly how to heal what it uncovers.

Proverbs 20:5 says:

"Though good advice lies deep within the heart, a person with understanding will draw it out."

>

— Proverbs 20:5 (NLT)

God has the insight. He knows how to draw out what's buried. And when He does, transformation happens. Deep, lasting, bedrock transformation.

Song Integration

"Time heals all wounds"—it sounds like truth until you discover something painful: time doesn't heal wounds. Time just buries them deeper under layers of scar tissue until we've convinced ourselves we're fine when we're actually just numb.

"Dig a Little Deeper" emerged from that season of excavation—when I learned you can't heal what you won't feel, and you can't feel what you keep buried.

My counselor, Dr. Tom 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. Treat the wound properly, set the bone right, then time becomes a servant of healing and ceases to be its enemy. As it is with the body so it is with the soul, the interaction, the conversation, and the relationship."

>

—Dr. Tom Petit

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.

The song begins by calling out the platitude: "They say that time can heal what's broke, but it just whispers empty hope." 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: "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.

The bridge confesses dependence: "I can't do this on my own, but I was never meant to be alone." We need divine help and human help. "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.

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.

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.

[Outro]

Time can't heal what only Love can mend,

But Your grace is faithful to the end.

So I'll dig, dig a little deeper,
Until I find You there.

Key Takeaways

- Time doesn't heal wounds—proper treatment does. Scars can fool you into thinking you're healed when you're just covered up. Real healing requires excavation, not just waiting.
- You can't heal what you won't feel. To heal deep wounds, you must cut through scar tissue, open the pain, drain the infection, and let grace reach what's been buried.
- Transformation is excavation, not construction. You're not building a new self—you're uncovering your true self by removing layers of wounds, shame, and false beliefs until you hit bedrock truth.
- The deepest truth is your belovedness. Beneath all the layers—performance, shame, wounds, lies—is the unchanging reality: you are loved, worthy, and enough because God says so.

Reflections for the Road

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?

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"—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.

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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."

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— 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.

In the swamp, survival was the only option. You were drowning—just trying to breathe, trying to make it one more day.

At the water's edge, you moved from drowning to breathing. From desperation to hope. From death to life.

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.

The Journey Into Rhythm:

Chapter 8: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/jYgQNf>

Chapter 9: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/DxCmnx>

Chapter 10: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/MN36D4>

Chapter 11: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/smBjeW>

Chapter 12: 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.

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/jIthAe>

These 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 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.

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:

Movement 1: The Swamp - You learned to be honest. You named where you were. You cried out for help. You let something die.

Movement 2: The Water's Edge - You encountered grace. You were washed. You discovered shadow and shelter. You received amazing grace. You dug deeper.

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?

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 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.

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 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.

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 8: Unforced Rhythms of Grace.

\pagebreak

Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 8)

MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

Chapter 8: Unforced Rhythms of Grace

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/jYgQNF>



"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

You've walked through seven chapters now. You've named the swamp, cried out for help, 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.

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.

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.

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... The danger is that we may fail to perceive life, and fall into a working routine and a sleeping routine." — Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines**

Rhythm requires unlearning. It requires deprogramming years of messages that tied your worth to your productivity. It requires believing something scandalous: God delights in you when you're resting as much as when you're working.

Maybe more.

Key Themes

1. From Hype to Home: The Set Point Theory

There's a concept in psychology called the "set point" theory—a baseline level of well-being that's relatively stable over time. Good things happen, bad things happen, but we tend to return to our set point.

Here's why this matters for understanding grace: Grace doesn't promise constant emotional highs.

Grace offers something better: a stable foundation beneath the fluctuations.

Not hype, but home.

Not peak experiences, but sustainable presence.

Not manufactured intensity, but authentic rhythm.

You can have a hard day and still be grounded in grace. You can feel sad and still be held by God. You can experience disappointment, frustration, even anger—and still be living in the unforced rhythms of grace.

Because grace isn't about eliminating life's natural ups and downs. It's about providing the steady baseline—the set point—from which you experience them.

I spent years chasing the high. The worship experience that gave me goosebumps. The prayer time where I felt God's presence palpably. The Bible study where everything clicked.

And then I'd crash. The goosebumps would fade. The presence would feel distant. The clarity would blur. And I'd think, "I'm losing it. I'm backslicing. I need to try harder."

So I'd manufacture the intensity. Force the experience. Push for the feeling.

And I'd burn out. Again and again.

Until I discovered: Grace isn't the high. Grace is the home. The stable foundation. The set point.

Some days are up. Some days are down. But underneath it all, there's grace. Steady. Reliable. New every morning.

Henri Nouwen captures this:

*"The greatest gift of the spiritual life is to be able to rest in God's presence." — Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son**

Not to perform in God's presence. Not to achieve in God's presence. To rest.

2. Daily Bread, Daily Grace: The Manna Experience

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God provided manna—bread from heaven—every single morning. But there were rules: gather only what you need for today. Don't try to hoard it for tomorrow. Trust that tomorrow will have its own provision.

Living in unforced rhythms means participating in a manna experience:

- You don't have to figure out next month's provision today
- You just gather today's manna

- You trust tomorrow will have its own
- You don't hoard grace; you receive it fresh each morning

This is what Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Not weekly bread. Not monthly bread. Daily bread.

I'm a planner. I want to have the next three months figured out. I want backup plans for my backup plans. I want to secure tomorrow's grace today, just in case God doesn't show up tomorrow.

But that's not how manna works. That's not how grace works.

When Israel tried to hoard manna, it rotted. It bred worms. It stank.

When I try to hoard grace—when I try to manufacture tomorrow's provision today—it does the same thing. It becomes dead religion instead of living relationship. Performance instead of presence. Anxiety instead of trust.

The manna experience teaches me: Today's grace is sufficient for today. And tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow.

This is freedom. The freedom to be fully present to today instead of anxiously trying to control tomorrow.

3. From Survival to Thriving: Asking Different Questions

In the swamp, survival was the only option. How do I make it through today? How do I keep breathing?

At the water's edge, you moved from crisis to cleansing. Still focused on immediate needs.

But in the unforced rhythms of grace, you're learning to thrive. You're not just reacting to crises anymore. You're building a sustainable life. You're asking different questions:

- What do I want to see MORE of in my life?
- What do I want to see LESS of?
- What do I want NOT AT ALL anymore?

MORE: Connection with God. Authentic community. Creative expression. Rest. Joy. Presence.

LESS: Hurry. Performance. People-pleasing. Comparison. Distraction.

NOT AT ALL: Shame. Fear-based motivation. Relationships that drain rather than energize.

These aren't rules. They're rhythms. Patterns you choose because they bring life.

And here's the beautiful thing: When you live from these rhythms long enough, they stop feeling like discipline and start feeling like desire. You don't have to force yourself to rest—you crave it.

This is the shift from duty to delight. From obligation to overflow. From working toward rest to working from rest.

Becoming Real Takes Time

Margery Williams captures this in *The Velveteen Rabbit*:

"It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time... Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand." — Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit

Becoming Real—learning to live in unforced rhythms—means being loved into authenticity over time. Your rough edges get worn smooth through the daily friction of grace. You get "loose in the joints"—less rigid, more flexible, more able to bend without breaking. You become "shabby" by the world's standards—less polished, less impressive. But you're Real. Authentic. No longer performing.

This is what the unforced rhythms are creating in you. Not overnight transformation. But steady, gentle, persistent becoming.

You're being loved into who you actually are. And that takes time. Be patient with yourself.

4. Jesus' Rhythm: The Model for Sustainability

If you want to understand unforced rhythms, watch Jesus. He's the master of sustainable spiritual life. He never burned out. Never collapsed under the weight of ministry. Never lost His connection to the Father.

How?

Rhythm.

Mark 1:35 captures it perfectly:

"Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray." — Mark 1:35 (NLT)

This wasn't a one-time event. It was His pattern. His rhythm. Withdrawal and engagement. Solitude and community. Prayer and action. Rest and work.

Jesus would pour Himself out in ministry—teaching, healing, casting out demons. Then He would withdraw. To a solitary place. To pray. To reconnect with the Father. To be refilled.

He didn't wait until He was empty. He maintained the rhythm.

Engagement. Withdrawal. Engagement. Withdrawal.

Because He lived in this rhythm, He had something to give. Not out of duty. Out of overflow.

And notice: Jesus faced immense pressure to skip the rhythm. People were sick. Crowds were waiting. There was always more to do.

But He protected the rhythm. He withdrew even when others wanted more from Him. He rested even when the need was urgent.

Why? Because He knew: If I don't maintain the rhythm, I'll have nothing to give.

I've spent most of my Christian life trying to give from empty. Leading worship when I was spiritually depleted. Teaching when I hadn't spent time with God myself. Serving when I desperately needed rest.

And I wondered why I burned out.

Jesus shows a different way. Maintain the rhythm. Not after you've earned it. Not when the work is done. As part of the work.

Stories of Rhythm

The Manna in the Wilderness (Exodus 16)

God's provision for Israel wasn't a one-time miracle. It was a daily rhythm. Every morning, manna appeared on the ground.

"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.'" — Exodus 16:4

This was a test. Not 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.

But those who learned the rhythm—gather today's manna, trust tomorrow's will come—were sustained. Day after day. Year after year.

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.

Elijah's Burnout and Recovery (1 Kings 19)

Elijah had just experienced one of the greatest spiritual victories in Israel's history. Mount Carmel. Fire from heaven. The prophets of Baal defeated. Elijah at the peak of his ministry.

And then, one message from Queen Jezebel: "By this time tomorrow, you'll be dead."

And Elijah crashed.

Not gradually. Instantly. He ran into the wilderness, collapsed under a broom tree, and prayed to die:

"I have had enough, LORD. Take my life."

This is burnout. Total depletion. The crash after the adrenaline high.

God's response is instructive. He didn't rebuke Elijah for weakness. Didn't lecture him about faith. 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." Fresh-baked bread and water. Elijah 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, 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.

God honored the rhythm. Work. Rest. Engagement. Withdrawal. Victory. Recovery.

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.

God isn't impressed by our burnout. He's pleased by our sustainability.

The Sabbath Rest (Genesis 2; 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. Six days of work. One day of rest.

This isn't arbitrary. It's design. God made you to need rest. To need rhythm.

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.

Sabbath says: Your worth isn't measured by your productivity. You are beloved even when you're not producing. 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.

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.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened"

Jesus' invitation is not to the strong. 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." Rest. Soul rest. The kind that comes not from escaping responsibility but from living in rhythm with grace.

"Take my yoke upon you"

Jesus isn't calling you to quit everything. 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.

"Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"

Jesus doesn't drive you with shame. Doesn't demand perfection. 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.

"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.

Light doesn't mean weightless. It means right-sized. Not crushing. Bearable. More than bearable—life-giving.

The Wayfarer Moment

The shift from frenzy to rhythm doesn't happen all at once. It happens one choice at a time.

For years, I lived in frenzy. Crisis mode. Always reacting. Always behind. Always exhausted. I thought that's what faithfulness looked like—burning out for Jesus.

But frenzy isn't faithfulness. It's fear. Fear that if I slow down, I'll fall behind. Fear that if I rest, I'll be lazy. Fear that if I'm not producing, I'm not valuable.

The wayfarer moment came when I realized: this isn't sustainable. I can't keep living like this. And God doesn't want me to.

I began to ask different questions:

- What rhythms bring me life?
- What drains me?
- What does rest actually look like for me?

And slowly—so slowly—I started making different choices.

I started saying no to some good things so I could say yes to the most important things.

I started protecting time for rest, not as an afterthought when all the work was done, but as a priority woven into my rhythm.

I started paying attention to my limits and honoring them instead of pretending they didn't exist.

I started gathering today's manna and trusting that tomorrow would have its own.

This didn't happen overnight. It's still happening. I still slip into frenzy sometimes. I still over-commit.

But I'm learning. Learning the unforced rhythms. Learning to walk in step with grace. Learning to work from rest instead of toward it.

And here's what I'm discovering: sustainable faithfulness is possible. You don't have to burn out to be faithful. You can live in rhythm. You can thrive.

Song Integration

I was drowning in activity when I discovered that Jesus' yoke is actually easy. For years, I'd been living at breakneck speed—calendar packed, to-do list never-ending, mind constantly racing. I wore busyness like a badge of honor, convinced that exhaustion proved devotion. But I was running on fumes, burned out. Then I crashed. Not dramatically—just stopped.

In that crashed season, my counselor asked me a question I couldn't answer: "When was the last time you noticed God's presence without trying to do

anything with it?" I sat there, silent. Because every spiritual practice had become performance. Every quiet time had an agenda. I'd turned even rest into productivity. He gave me one assignment: "Go for a walk. Don't pray. Don't problem-solve. Don't plan. Just notice." And then: "Read Matthew 11:28-30. Not to study it. Just to hear it."

Eugene Peterson's translation in *The Message* unlocked everything: "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."

Unforced rhythms. That phrase stopped me. Because everything in my life felt forced—forced discipline, forced devotion, forced productivity. I was carrying a yoke, but it wasn't easy and light. It was heavy and crushing. And Jesus was saying: That's not My yoke. Mine has rhythm. And the rhythm is unforced.

So I went for the walk. One of the first times I'd walked without an agenda in years. No podcast. No problem to solve. Just walking. Noticing. The sun coming up. Air cool. Dew on the grass catching the light. Birds singing. My own breathing—in and out, steady, unforced. And I felt something I hadn't felt in years: peace. Not the absence of problems, but a deep-down settledness that said, "This moment is enough."

This was what Jesus meant. This unforced presence. This gentle noticing. This rhythm that doesn't demand but invites. Not the frenzy of "I have to do more" but the rhythm of "I'm already held." Not the grinding of "I must prove my worth" but the breathing of "I'm already loved."

The song had to sound unforced. So the tempo is slow, gentle—like a walk, not a run. Like inhaling and exhaling, not gasping. The melody flows without sharp edges. The instrumentation is sparse—space between the notes, room to breathe. The opposite of the packed-calendar, no-margin life I'd been living.

The verses move through different times of day—sunset, morning, starry night—each one an invitation to notice, to be present. But then the chorus shifts: "Great is Your faithfulness, steady and true, mercies each morning are always brand new." This anchors everything in Lamentations 3:22-23. Life still has ebb and flow, but underneath it all, there's grace—steady, reliable, new every

morning.

The bridge acknowledges reality: "Life feels like ebb and flow, highs and lows take their toll." Because the chaos does return. But now I have a different response: "But in Your presence I find my rest, held in the stillness You manifest." Rest isn't the absence of activity. Rest is presence—being held in God's stillness even when life isn't still.

When I slip back into frenzy, I sing this. And it brings me back—back to breath, back to rhythm, back to the truth that Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Lyrics: Unforced Rhythms 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.

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?

Be specific. What would it look like to build this rhythm into your week?

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. 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.

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Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 9)

MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

Chapter 9: Deep Roots, Strong Growth

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/DxCmnx>



"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

You've discovered rhythm. You've learned the unforced way of living. You're not in crisis mode anymore.

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?

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.

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."

That's the prayer that opens transformation.

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.

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
- Practicing humility in small, daily choices that no one applauds

None of that is impressive. None of that gets likes on social media.

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

1. The Work of Putting to Death

Before roots can go deep into what belongs, they have to let go of what doesn't.

There are things that have to be put to death:

Pride - The need to be right. The compulsion to prove ourselves. The addiction to being seen, recognized, validated by others.

Pride keeps roots shallow because it keeps us focused on ourselves rather than God. We're constantly comparing, competing, defending, performing. All that energy goes into image management rather than transformation.

I've spent years defending myself. Explaining myself. Making sure people understood my motives. And all that defending kept me shallow. Because I was more concerned with how I looked than with who I was becoming.

Humility is the antidote. Not self-hatred. But the freedom to be wrong and still be loved. To lose the argument and not lose yourself.

Reactivity - Responding from wounds instead of from identity. When someone criticizes you, do you react defensively? When life doesn't go your way, do you lash out?

Reactivity is living from your False Self—the wounded, defended, self-protective version of you.

Deep roots grow when you learn to respond from your True Self—the beloved, secure, grounded-in-God version of you.

There's a space between what happens to us and how we respond. In that space lies our power to choose.

I've been working on this for years, and I still fail regularly. Someone questions my decision, and I immediately get defensive. Someone misunderstands my motives, and I rush to explain. Someone hurts me, and I want to hurt back.

But I'm learning. Learning to pause. To feel the reaction without acting on it. To ask: "Is this coming from my woundedness or from my belovedness?"

That pause—that space between stimulus and response—is where deep roots grow.

Isolation - The temptation to withdraw when things get hard. To hide your struggles. To pretend you're fine when you're not.

Isolation is the enemy of deep roots. Trees don't grow in isolation—they grow in groves, forests, communities where their roots intertwine with other roots, creating stability and sharing nutrients.

I'm an introvert. When I'm hurting, my instinct is to withdraw. To pull back. To process alone. And sometimes that's healthy. But isolation as a lifestyle? That's deadly.

Deep roots require staying connected even when you want to withdraw. Showing up to community even when you don't feel like it. Being honest about your struggles even when it's scary.

Bitterness - The nursing of perceived injustices. The rehearsal of how you've been wronged. The refusal to forgive.

Bitterness is like poison in the soil. It doesn't hurt the person you're bitter toward—it hurts you. It keeps your roots shallow and twisted.

I've carried bitterness. Rehearsed conversations with people who hurt me. Kept score. Built cases. And all that bitterness did was keep me stuck.

Forgiveness is the answer. Not because what happened was okay. But because holding onto it gives it power over you.

You release it so your roots can grow deep into grace rather than staying tangled in grievance.

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." — Lewis B. Smedes, Forgive and Forget

2. The Work of Cultivating What Belongs

Putting to death is only half the work. The other half is cultivating what belongs—the virtues, practices, and postures that create conditions for deep roots.

Humility - Acknowledging your need for grace. Admitting you don't have it all together. Embracing your limits rather than pretending they don't exist.

Humility positions you to receive. Pride keeps you on the surface, performing. Humility sends roots deep, receiving.

Responsiveness - Acting from your True Self, not your wounded self. Learning to pause between stimulus and response.

This requires self-awareness—knowing your triggers, understanding your patterns, recognizing when you're operating from wounds versus operating from belovedness.

Connection - Staying engaged even when vulnerable. Showing up even when it's hard. Choosing relationship over isolation.

I've learned this the hard way: I need people. Not perfect people. Not people who never disappoint me. But people who show up. Who pray for me. Who tell me the truth in love.

Connection is where roots deepen.

Forgiveness - Releasing what you can't control. Letting go of the need for justice, vindication, or revenge.

Forgiveness isn't a one-time decision. It's a daily practice. Sometimes an hourly practice. You choose to release the offense again and again until one day you realize it no longer has power over you.

3. The Tree by Streams of Water

Psalm 1 paints a picture of flourishing:

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked... but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers." — Psalm 1:1-3

Notice the progression:

Planted, not drifting. Intentional, rooted, stable. You've been planted by streams—the water's edge of grace. Now roots are growing deep.

Streams of water. The tree doesn't generate its own water. It's positioned by an abundant source. You don't generate your own grace. You're rooted in God's inexhaustible provision.

Fruit in season. Not all the time. Not constantly. In season. This is realistic spirituality. There are seasons of growth, seasons of fruit, seasons of dormancy, seasons of pruning.

Leaf does not wither. Even in drought—when emotions are dry, when external supports fail—the deeply rooted tree endures. Why? Because deep roots access water others can't reach.

Whatever they do prospers. Not prosperity gospel. This is organic flourishing. A well-rooted tree naturally prospers because it's connected to its source.

4. Roots Take Time

Here's what nobody tells you about deep roots: they take time. Years. Sometimes decades.

We want microwavable transformation. But roots don't work that way.

A tree doesn't shoot roots thirty feet down in a week. It takes seasons. Storm after storm. Drought after drought. Year after year, the roots slowly, steadily go deeper.

And for most of that time, you can't see the growth. Above ground, the tree might look unchanged. But below ground, everything is happening.

This is the hidden work of transformation.

I'm fifteen years into this journey. And I'm still discovering shallow roots. Still finding places where I react instead of respond. Still uncovering bitterness I thought I'd released. Still learning to stay connected when I want to withdraw.

But I'm also seeing growth I couldn't see five years ago. Situations that would have wrecked me ten years ago now just... don't. Not because I'm stronger. Because the roots have gone deeper. I'm accessing streams I couldn't reach before.

This is the long obedience in the same direction. This is the slow work of becoming.

"A Christian is never in a state of completion but always in the process of becoming." — Martin Luther, Lectures on Romans

Stories of Roots and Growth

The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23)

Picture a farmer scattering seed. The birds descend immediately on the hardened path—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 soil. Fast growth, visible progress. But underneath, the roots hit stone. They can't go deep. When the sun climbs high and hot, these plants are the first to wilt. No water reaches them. They 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 crowd them out. The plants survive but never thrive. They're strangled slowly by competition.

But the good soil—this is different. The seeds sink in. The roots go down, spreading through soil that's been prepared. When the sun beats down, these roots reach moisture. When storms come, these roots hold firm. And when harvest comes, they're heavy with grain.

Jesus explains the rocky ground:

"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.

Don't settle for surface-level faith. Send roots deep now—through sustained practices, patient trust, consistent rhythms—so when heat comes (and it will), you don't wither.

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. Run your hand along a healthy branch and you can feel it: firm, supple, alive. The connection point where branch meets vine is seamless. Sap flows from the vine, carrying nutrients, water, life itself.

Pick up a branch that's been cut off and the difference is immediate. It looks similar at first. But touch it and you feel the brittleness. The leaves are already browning. Give it a few days and it's completely dead.

"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." Branches don't try to produce fruit through effort. They remain connected to the vine. And fruit happens naturally, organically.

You don't manufacture fruit through striving. You remain connected through sustained practices—prayer, Scripture, worship, community. And fruit grows the way grapes grow on a branch: not by trying, but by remaining.

Jeremiah's Promise (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

Picture two trees during a drought year. The first tree stands alone in an open field, dependent entirely on rainfall. Its roots spread wide but shallow. As the rainless months stretch on, its leaves yellow, then brown. It drops them early. It survives, barely, but produces no fruit.

The second tree looks different. Its leaves are deep green. It stands tall, full, healthy—not because it's stronger by nature, but because of where it's planted: right by a stream. Its 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

Trust as the foundation. Your roots go where your trust is. If you trust yourself, roots stay shallow. If you trust God, roots go deep—accessing an infinite source.

Does not fear when heat comes. 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. When you're deeply rooted in God, you don't become fruitless in hard seasons. The fruit might look different—not abundance, but endurance. But you never fail to bear it.

The Core Scripture Truth

John 15:5 - "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."

This is Jesus's teaching on remaining—on abiding.

"I am the vine; you are the branches."

The relationship is organic, not mechanical. 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. 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.

"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.

Deep roots make abiding possible. And abiding makes fruit inevitable.

The Wayfarer Moment

Learning to trust the hidden work.

For years, I equated spiritual growth with visible progress. I wanted to see results. Measure outcomes. Track my advancement.

If I couldn't see it, I questioned whether anything was actually happening.

But roots don't work that way.

The most important growth happens underground. Unseen. Unmeasured. Unremarkable to anyone watching.

Above ground, a tree might look unchanged for months. But below ground, roots are spreading, reaching, deepening.

I learned this the hard way. After coming out of the swamp, after encountering grace at the water's edge, I wanted instant transformation. I wanted to be different immediately—healed, whole, bearing fruit.

But God was growing roots.

There were days when I felt like nothing was changing. I'd pray and feel nothing. Read Scripture and feel unmoved. Gather with community and still feel alone.

But looking back now, I can see what was happening. Roots were going deep. Not dramatically. Not visibly. But steadily.

Through sustained practices. Through showing up even when I didn't feel like it. Through choosing connection over isolation. Through releasing bitterness and cultivating forgiveness.

The wayfarer moment came when I stopped measuring my progress by what I could see and started trusting the hidden work God was doing.

I stopped asking, "Why aren't I different yet?" and started asking, "Am I remaining in Him? Are my roots going deeper?"

Because here's what I've learned: surface-level change happens fast but doesn't last. Deep transformation happens slowly but endures.

You can manufacture behavior change through willpower. But it won't last. The first time stress hits, you'll revert to old patterns.

But deep roots—roots that reach down to streams of living water—create lasting stability. Not perfection. But resilience.

I still have hard days. Days when I'm reactive instead of responsive. Days when I choose isolation over connection. Days when bitterness resurfaces and I have to forgive again.

But I don't panic anymore. Because I know: the roots are there. They're deep. And even when I can't see growth above ground, there's work happening below.

This is the invitation: trust the hidden work. Keep showing up. Keep practicing the disciplines. Keep remaining in Jesus. The fruit will come. In season. When roots are ready.

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 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: Deep Roots, Strong Growth

[Verse 1]

I will trust You, Lord, my shelter, my song

Planted by Your stream, where my roots grow strong

When the heat is near, still my leaves stay bright

In the darkest storm, You will be my light

[Pre-Chorus]

Oh, my heart is grounded deep in Your grace

Anchored in Your presence, I will stand in faith

[Chorus]

Like a tree beside the river, I will stand so tall

Through the fire, through the season, You're my all in all

My leaves stay green, my soul stays strong

Your love sustains me all life long

I will bear Your fruit, Lord, make me new

I am deeply rooted in You

[Verse 2]

I will drink Your Word, let it fill my soul

Day and night I'll seek You, Lord, You make me whole

When the winds arise, I will not be swayed

For my roots run deep, I will not be afraid

[Pre-Chorus]

Oh, my heart is grounded deep in Your grace

Anchored in Your presence, I will stand in faith

[Chorus]

Like a tree beside the river, I will stand so tall

Through the fire, through the season, You're my all in all

My leaves stay green, my soul stays strong

Your love sustains me all life long

I will bear Your fruit, Lord, make me new

I am deeply rooted in You

[Bridge]

No fear in the drought (No fear, no fear!)

No doubt in the storm (No doubt, no doubt!)

Your love is my anchor (My heart is Yours!)

I'll trust You, Lord (Forevermore!)

[Final Chorus]

Like a tree beside the river, I will stand so tall

Through the fire, through the season, You're my all in all

My leaves stay green, my soul stays strong

Your love sustains me all life long

I will bear Your fruit, Lord, make me new

I am deeply rooted in You

[Outro]

Deeply rooted, never shaken
By Your love, I stand so strong
Deeply rooted, always faithful
In Your hands, I belong

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:

1. 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?

2. What practices position you by the stream?

Prayer? Scripture? Sabbath? Solitude? Worship? Community? Are you practicing them consistently?

3. 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?

4. 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?

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.

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Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 10)

MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

Chapter 10: Redemption's Story

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/MN36D4>



"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done." — Genesis 50:20

An Invitation to See

You've been through nine 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.

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.

Key Themes

1. The Gospel as THE Story

Christianity isn't one religious option among many. It's THE story—the framework within which human history unfolds.

The redemption story has a clear arc:

Creation - God makes everything good. Humanity is created in His image, designed for relationship with Him. Before any of us sinned, we had worth because we were created by God, for God, to reflect God.

Fall - Sin enters through human rebellion. The image is marred. Relationship is broken. Death enters the world. Humanity is exiled from Eden. This is the swamp—not just your personal swamp, but the cosmic swamp we're all born into.

Redemption - God doesn't abandon His creation. He sends His Son. Jesus becomes flesh. Lives the perfect life we couldn't live. Dies the death we deserved. Rises victorious over sin and death. Accomplishes redemption.

Restoration - The story isn't finished. Jesus ascended but promised to return. He's building His Church. He's reconciling all things to Himself. And one day He will return to judge the living and the dead, to make all things new.

This is THE story. Timothy Keller puts it:

*"The Christian story is that God descended into our mess, took the full brunt of our sin and death, and triumphed over it in Jesus." — Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God**

Not self-help, but divine rescue. Not moral improvement, but death and resurrection.

2. Your Story Within God's Story

Your personal narrative isn't separate from God's narrative. It's woven into it. Your redemption story is a particular expression of THE redemption story.

When you were in the swamp, you weren't just struggling with personal sin. You were experiencing the effects of the fall.

When you cried out for help, you were participating in the pattern of human cry and divine response that runs throughout Scripture.

When you encountered grace at the water's edge, you were meeting the same God who appeared to Moses, who led Israel through the Red Sea, who sent His Son to seek and save the lost.

When you died to self and rose in new life, you were participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus. United with Him in His death. Raised with Him in His resurrection. A new creation.

Your story matters because it's part of God's story. The specifics are yours, but the pattern is universal. The arc is the same.

Michael Card reminds us:

*"We are not the hero of our own story. We live, instead, in God's story." — Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow**

I'm not the protagonist trying to write my own happy ending. I'm a character in a much larger narrative—one written by an Author who knows how to redeem every broken chapter.

3. Nothing Wasted

One of the most powerful promises in the redemption story is this: nothing is wasted.

Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Notice: Paul doesn't say all things are good. They're not. Sin is evil. Suffering is real. Brokenness hurts.

But he does say God works in all things for good. He's taking even the broken pieces—especially the broken pieces—and weaving them into a story of redemption.

Joseph's story is the perfect illustration. Betrayed by his brothers. Sold into slavery. Falsely accused. Imprisoned. Forgotten.

But God was at work the whole time. And when Joseph finally sees the bigger story, he can say to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

You intended harm. God intended good.

Not that God caused the harm. But that He redeemed it.

This is the promise for you: the years you spent in the swamp aren't wasted. God is redeeming them.

Christine Caine writes:

"Nothing is wasted in the economy of God. Not a tear, not a heartbreak, not a disappointment." — Christine Caine, Undaunted

This isn't wishful thinking—it's the pattern we see throughout Scripture.

4. Living as Part of the Larger Story

When you grasp that your story is part of God's story, it changes how you live.

You live with purpose. Your life isn't random. You're part of God's redemption project.

You live with hope. No matter how hard today is, you know the ending. The story doesn't end with suffering. It ends with restoration.

You live with perseverance. The struggles you face aren't meaningless. They're part of the redemption arc.

You live with mission. You're not just receiving redemption. You're participating in it. You bring light into dark places. Hope into despair. Grace into brokenness.

You live with gratitude. When you see the whole arc—creation, fall, redemption, restoration—you're overwhelmed by grace.

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. Even as God pronounces the curse, He promises redemption.

The entire Old Testament is the unfolding of this promise. Until finally, in the fullness of time, the Seed comes: Jesus, born of a woman, who crushes the serpent's head at the cross.

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. His brothers hate him for it.

One day they grab him. Strip off the coat. Throw him into an empty cistern. They sell him to passing traders. Twenty shekels of silver.

Joseph ends up in Egypt as a slave. He works his way up, proves himself trustworthy—and Potiphar's wife propositions him. He refuses. 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, asks to be remembered. But he's forgotten. Two more years pass.

Then Pharaoh has a dream. 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.

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 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 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)

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."

Peter 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, Jesus is arrested. Peter follows at a distance. A servant girl looks at him in the firelight. "This man was with him."

"Woman, I don't know him."

A little later: "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!"

About an hour passes. Another person insists: "Certainly this fellow was with him."

"Man, I don't know what you're talking about!"

Immediately, the rooster crows. Jesus turns and looks at Peter. Their eyes meet. And Peter remembers. He goes outside and weeps bitterly.

After the resurrection, Jesus finds Peter fishing. They cook breakfast on the beach. And Jesus restores Peter—three questions mirroring the three denials.

"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.

Paul's Transformation (Acts 9; 1 Timothy 1:12-16)

Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus is breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He's hunting down Christians, dragging them to prison.

But on the road to Damascus, a light from heaven flashes around him. He falls to the ground.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

The persecutor becomes the apostle. The one who tried to destroy the church becomes the one who builds it across the Roman Empire.

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."

Let's unpack it:

"In all things God works for the good"

Not some things. All things. God is at work in the swamp and at the water's edge, in the dying and in the rising.

This doesn't mean all things are good. They're not. But it does mean God is working in all things.

"For the good of those who love him"

The promise is conditional. It's for those who are in relationship with Him.

If you've entered the redemption story—if you've trusted in Jesus—then this promise is yours.

"Called... justified... glorified"

Called - God pursued you. Spoke to you. Drew you to Himself.

Justified - You were declared righteous. Not because you earned it. But because Jesus' righteousness was credited to you.

Glorified - Past tense. Even though it's future. Why? Because in God's eternal perspective, it's already done.

You will be glorified—fully redeemed, completely restored, eternally with Christ.

The Wayfarer Moment

Seeing my story in THE story.

For years, I thought my story was just mine. My struggles. My failures. My small attempts to get it right.

I'd read the Bible as ancient history—good for principles, maybe, but not personally connected to my everyday life.

But then I started to see it.

The pattern of my life—swamp, water's edge, dying, rising, rhythms, roots—wasn't unique to me. It was the redemption arc. The same arc that runs through Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

I wasn't just struggling with personal sin. I was experiencing the fall.

I wasn't just crying out for help. I was participating in the pattern that echoes through the Psalms.

I wasn't just encountering grace. I was meeting the same God who met Moses, David, Peter, Paul.

I wasn't just dying to self. I was being united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

My story was part of THE story.

And when I saw that—really saw it—everything changed.

The pain I'd experienced wasn't meaningless. It was part of the redemption arc. God was using it to conform me to Christ's image.

The waiting seasons weren't wasted. They were necessary parts of the story. Times of preparation. Wilderness experiences that would later become testimonies.

The failures I'd carried with shame weren't the end of my story. They were chapters in a larger redemption narrative. Like Peter's denial. Like Paul's persecution. Like Joseph's pit.

God was redeeming them, transforming them into testimonies of grace.

The wayfarer moment came when I stopped seeing my life as disconnected events and started seeing it as a coherent narrative—my story woven into God's story.

I'm not the author. I'm a character. But I'm a beloved character in a story written by a good Author who knows how to turn crucifixions into resurrections.

I don't know how my particular story will unfold. I don't know what chapters are ahead.

But I know the Author. I know the arc. I know the ending.

Creation. Fall. Redemption. Restoration. Consummation.

And I know that in all things—**ALL** things—God is working for good. Nothing is wasted. Every pain has purpose. Every struggle is part of the redemption arc.

This is THE story. And by grace, it's my story too.

Song Integration

For years, my life felt like disconnected pieces. Random events. Unrelated struggles. Pain here, joy there, failure in one season, growth in another—but no coherent thread tying it all together.

I looked at my story and saw chaos. Mistakes I couldn't undo. Seasons that felt wasted. Suffering that seemed meaningless.

Questions haunted me: Why did that relationship fail? Why did I waste those years in the swamp? Why did God allow that betrayal? What was the point of all that pain?

I was so focused on my own story—my struggles, my failures, my journey—that I'd lost sight of THE story. The grand narrative of redemption that's been unfolding since before the foundation of the world.

The turning point came during a season of deep study. I began to see the Bible not as a collection of disconnected morality tales, but as one coherent story with a single redemption arc.

Creation → Fall → Israel → Incarnation → Cross & Resurrection → Church → Consummation.

And slowly—painfully slowly—I began to see: my story wasn't random. It was part of THE story.

The pain I'd experienced? Part of the redemption arc—God conforming me to Christ's image through suffering.

The waiting seasons? Not wasted, but necessary. Wilderness experiences preparing me for what was ahead.

The failures? Like Peter's denial. Like Paul's persecution. Like Joseph's pit. God was redeeming them, weaving them into a larger narrative of grace.

This song is my attempt to tell THE story. Not just the cross (though the cross is central). The whole story. From creation through consummation. The full redemption arc.

I wanted to trace redemption history chronologically—from "before the stars" through Eden, through the prophets, through Mary's baby boy, through the cross, to the promise of standing before His throne.

And when you see your story within that larger story, everything changes.

Where my life felt chaotic, THE story reveals purpose.

Where my pain felt meaningless, THE story reveals redemption.

Where my failures felt final, THE story reveals resurrection.

I don't know how all the pieces of my story fit together yet. I don't see the full picture.

But I know the Author. I know the arc. I know the ending.

Creation. Fall. Redemption. Restoration. Consummation.

And by grace—scandalous, undeserved, transforming grace—my story is part of THE story.

Lyrics: Redemption Story

[Verse 1]

Before the stars adorned the night,

Before the sun gave earth its light,

The Word was spoken, creation came,

Through Jesus, the Maker, who knew our name.

He formed the earth, the skies, the seas,

Breathed life into humanity.

From dust we rose, His Spirit's flame,

To bear His image, to praise His name.

[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.

[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.

[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 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.
- The Gospel is THE Story that makes sense of your story. Understanding the larger biblical narrative helps you see where you fit and why your life matters eternally.

Reflections for the Road

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)?

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..."

Where do you see yourself in this redemption arc—called, justified, being glorified?

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: "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?

What does their story tell you about your own?

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? Name the person. When will you share it?

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.

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Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 11)

MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

Chapter 11: Nothing is Wasted

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/smBjeW>



"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." — Romans 8:28

An Invitation to Believe the Impossible

You've come through ten 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? The ministry that blew up? The friendships you let die?

When you look back, do you see a timeline full of black holes? Years where nothing good grew. 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. You can't get it back. It's too late."

But here's what I've discovered:

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 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.

So before you continue, pause. 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. Show me how nothing is wasted."

Let's be brutally honest about what waste feels like.

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.
- Opportunities missed. Doors that closed while you were too paralyzed to walk through.
- Lessons learned too late. Wisdom that came after the damage was done.

This isn't just regret. Waste is "That season contributed nothing. It's just gone."

But grace whispers something different: "In God's economy, nothing is wasted."

Every tear. Every failure. Every lost year—God can redeem it all.

This doesn't mean the pain wasn't real. It doesn't mean the consequences don't matter.

It means God specializes in turning crucifixions into resurrections.

Key Themes

1. Timeline Reflection: Looking Back

Part of believing nothing is wasted is doing the hard work of timeline reflection.

This isn't nostalgia or rumination. It's intentionally asking:

- What moments brought joy?
- What moments brought pain?
- What patterns emerged?
- Where was grace at work even when I couldn't see it?

I've done this exercise multiple times over the years. Drew my timeline. Marked the major seasons.

And every time, I discover the same thing: grace was present even when I couldn't feel it. God was working even when I couldn't see it.

The years I thought were wasted? They taught me what I couldn't learn anywhere else. My desperate need for grace. Compassion for others who struggle. The cost of pride and the beauty of humility.

Even the wasted years became the very years that prepared me for the work I'm doing now.

2. Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah

Genesis 22 is one of the most challenging stories in Scripture. God asks Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

Abraham obeys. He takes Isaac up Mount Moriah. Builds the altar. Binds his son. Raises the knife.

And God provides a ram in the thicket. Isaac is spared.

"Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means 'the LORD will provide'). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.'" — Genesis 22:14 (NLT)

What could have been the most tragic waste becomes instead a revelation of God's character. The Lord provides. Always.

This is the promise for you: God specializes in last-minute provision. In turning what looks like absolute waste into absolute redemption.

The test itself wasn't wasted. The fear wasn't wasted. The faith required wasn't wasted.

All of it became part of the story told for generations: on the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided.

3. Romans 8:28 Rightly Understood

Perhaps no verse is more quoted—and more misunderstood—than Romans 8:28:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

This doesn't mean everything that happens is good. It doesn't mean God causes evil.

What it does mean: God is relentlessly committed to redeeming every moment of your story. Even the worst ones. Even the ones that feel utterly wasted.

God is at work, weaving them into something good.

I held this verse at arm's length for years. It felt like a platitude. Like minimizing real pain with Christian clichés.

But it's not a platitude. It's a promise. A promise that your pain has purpose. Your suffering isn't random. Your struggles aren't wasted.

God is working—actively, intentionally, lovingly—to bring good from it all.

*"God wastes nothing—not even sin. The soul that has struggled and come through is enriched by its struggle, and the grace of God is not frustrated." — Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life**

4. Suffering to Compassion

One of the most profound ways God ensures nothing is wasted is by transforming our suffering into compassion.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." — 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Your pain isn't wasted when it becomes the bridge to someone else's healing.

Your struggle isn't wasted when it becomes the testimony that gives someone else hope.

I've seen this in my own life. The years I spent in the swamp? They weren't wasted. Because now when someone else is drowning, I can sit with them and say, "I've been here. I know this place. And there's a way out."

The toxic relationships I stayed in too long? They taught me about codependency, about people-pleasing. And now I can help others recognize those patterns before the damage goes as deep.

The ministry position that blew up? It taught me about burnout. And now I can warn others away from that cliff.

Nothing is wasted because every experience—even the painful ones—can become a gift to others.

Stories of Redemption

Ruth: From Widow to Matriarch (Ruth 1-4)

Ruth's story is one of the most beautiful pictures of "nothing is wasted" in Scripture.

Loss. Death. Widowhood. Poverty. Displacement. Everything that looked like an ending became a doorway to something new.

When Naomi's husband and sons died in Moab, it seemed like total devastation. But Ruth refused to leave Naomi. "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

What looked like the end became the beginning. Ruth gleaned in Boaz's field. Boaz noticed her, redeemed her, married her. She became part of the lineage of

King David—and ultimately, of Jesus Himself.

The losses weren't wasted. The grief wasn't meaningless. All of it was being woven into a story of redemption that would echo through eternity.

The Cross: Ultimate Redemption of Waste

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 criminal. Three years of ministry, ended. Disciples scattered.

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.

"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.

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.

The Wasteland Restored (Joel 2:25-27)

After devastating judgment, God makes a promise:

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten... You will have plenty to eat, until you are full." — Joel 2:25-26

The years the locusts have eaten. The wasted years.

God doesn't just stop the locusts. He repays. He restores. He redeems the wasted years.

The Wayfarer Moment

The shift from regret to redemption doesn't happen all at once. It happens one memory at a time.

For years, I carried deep regret. Time wasted. Opportunities missed. Relationships broken. Years spent in patterns that brought nothing but pain.

I would look back and see waste. Just waste. And the weight of it was crushing.

But slowly—so slowly—I began to see differently. Not because the facts changed. But because my understanding of God's character deepened.

I started to ask different questions. Not "Why did I waste so much time?" but "Where was grace at work even when I couldn't see it?"

And the answers surprised me.

The years in the swamp taught me my desperate need for grace.

The mistakes taught me compassion for others who struggle.

The broken relationships taught me the cost of pride and the beauty of humility.

Even the wasted years became the very years that prepared me for the work I'm doing now.

Nothing was wasted. Not because I deserved redemption. But because God specializes in it.

I began doing timeline work—intentionally looking back at my life and tracing the thread of grace through every season.

And in every season, I found the same thing: God was there. Working. Weaving. Redeeming.

This didn't erase the pain. But it reframed the story.

What looked like waste became raw material for transformation.

What felt like lost years became the very years that made me who I am.

I'm learning to live from this truth: in the economy of God, nothing is wasted. Not the struggles. Not the failures. Not even the years I spent running from Him.

All of it—every moment, every tear, every broken piece—God is redeeming.

And if God can redeem my wasteland, He can redeem yours too.

Song Integration

My therapist laid out the timeline of my life across the table and asked, "Do you see the thread?"

I didn't. All I saw were the wasted years.

We'd been doing timeline work for weeks—mapping my life in seasons, marking the joyful ones and the painful ones.

And I kept coming back to the same question: "Were those years wasted?"

The years in toxic relationships. The job I stayed at too long. The ministry that blew up. The friendships that died. The opportunities I missed.

Were they wasted?

My first answer was always yes. Those years contributed nothing. They're just gone.

But as I sat with it—as I traced the thread of grace through even the darkest seasons—I started to see something different.

The toxic relationships taught me about boundaries, about self-worth.

The job I stayed at too long taught me resilience, taught me what I don't want.

The ministry that blew up taught me about burnout, about God's grace when everything falls apart.

None of it was wasted. All of it was being redeemed.

The song poured out as a declaration: "You will provide. You always do. Even when I walk through fire, You stay in the flame."

Not because the fire isn't real. But because God doesn't waste it. He uses it. Redeems it. Transforms it.

The chorus became my theology: "In the economy of Your love, nothing is wasted."

Not "almost nothing." Nothing.

Every tear. Every failure. Every lost year. God is weaving it into redemption.

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 together for good. 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. Your wounds become the very thing that allows you to reach people no one else can.
- Jehovah Jireh—God provides. Just as He provided a ram for Abraham, God provides what you need at the exact moment you need it.
- Nothing is wasted in God's economy. Every tear, every failure, every loss becomes an opportunity for grace.

Reflections for the Road

Questions for the Journey:

1. What season of your life feels most "wasted"? Name it. Where do you carry the most regret?
2. Do timeline work. Map your life in seasons. Mark the major ones. Where do you see patterns? Where do you see the thread of grace?
3. What suffering might God want to transform into compassion? Where have you been wounded? How might that pain become the bridge to someone else's healing?

4. Read Genesis 22 and Romans 8:28 slowly. What is God saying to you about provision and redemption?

Closing Image

You're standing on the mountain now. 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 was woven into the tapestry of your story.

You can see the ram in the thicket now. The provision that came at just the right moment.

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 Abraham whispered centuries ago: "On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided."

And you know—deep in your bones—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.

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Out of the Swamp: How I Found Truth (Chapter 12)

MOVEMENT 3: UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF LIFE (The Transformation)

Chapter 12: This Moment is Enough

Listen at: <http://go.skylerthomas.com/jIthAe>



"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

An Invitation to Be Here

You've journeyed through eleven chapters. From swamp to water's edge. From crisis to rhythm. From scattered to rooted. From waste to redemption.

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.

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. 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 living in the present might also feel like:

- Discomfort. Because the present requires you to feel what you've been avoiding.
- Vulnerability. Because being here means acknowledging what's actually true right now.
- Fear. Because if you're not planning for tomorrow or fixing yesterday, what if everything falls apart?

This is normal. Because presence challenges everything our culture teaches us about productivity, control, and security.

Our culture says: Plan everything. Control outcomes. Never slow down.

Grace says: Be here now. Trust God with outcomes. Rest is not weakness.

Presence is a practice. A discipline. A choice you make moment by moment to come back here, to this breath, to this moment, to this sufficient grace.

Key Themes

1. God's Name is "I AM" – Present Tense

When Moses asked God for His name, God didn't say "I was" or "I will be." He said:

"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."

>

— Exodus 3:14

Present tense. Always.

God isn't just the God of your past—though He was faithful there. He isn't just the God of your future—though He'll be faithful there too.

He is the God of your present. Here. Now. In this moment.

This changes everything. Because if God is present-tense, then His grace is present-tense too. Not stored up from yesterday. Not held back until tomorrow. Here. Now. Sufficient for this moment.

Paul writes: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Sufficient. Not abundant for tomorrow. Not excess for next week. Sufficient for today. For this moment. For this need.

That's all you need. And it's enough.

I spent years trying to secure tomorrow's grace today. Planning obsessively. Preparing for every contingency. Trying to control outcomes that weren't mine to control.

And I was exhausted. Anxious. Never present.

But when I learned to trust that God's grace is sufficient for this moment—and that tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow—I began to rest.

Not the rest of inactivity. The rest of presence. Being here. Trusting now.

2. Matthew 6:34 – Today's Troubles Are Sufficient

Jesus addresses our tendency to borrow tomorrow's worries:

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

>

— Matthew 6:34

This isn't fatalism. It's wisdom.

Jesus isn't saying troubles won't come. He's saying don't add tomorrow's troubles to today's load.

Today has enough to carry. Don't make it heavier by adding what hasn't happened yet.

I'm a worrier by nature. My mind races to worst-case scenarios. What if this happens? What if that fails? What if everything falls apart?

And Jesus says: Stop. Come back to today. Today has enough. You don't need to carry tomorrow too.

This is freedom. Real freedom. The freedom to engage fully with what's right in front of you instead of being paralyzed by what might come.

"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength."

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— Corrie ten Boom, *Clippings from My Notebook*

If anyone had reason to worry about tomorrow, it was Corrie. But she discovered that borrowing tomorrow's troubles only robs today of the grace needed to live it well.

3. The Manna Experience: Daily Bread

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God provided manna every morning. Daily bread. But the instruction was clear: gather only what you need for today. Don't try to hoard tomorrow's provision.

Those who tried to keep extra found it rotting by morning. The lesson: trust today's provision for today. Tomorrow will have its own.

This is living in the moment. Not grasping for more than you need. Not anxiously securing tomorrow. Just receiving today's grace and trusting tomorrow's will come.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

>

— Matthew 6:11

Not weekly bread. Not monthly bread. Daily bread.

Because grace is meant to be received in rhythm—morning by morning, day by day, moment by moment.

4. Mary and Martha: The Better Choice

The story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) perfectly captures the tension between doing and being, between productivity and presence.

Martha is distracted by preparations—good things, necessary things. But she's missing the moment. Missing the presence of Jesus right there in her home.

Mary, on the other hand, sits at Jesus' feet. Present. Attentive. Fully engaged in the moment.

Jesus' words to Martha are gentle but clear:

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

>

— Luke 10:41-42

The better choice: presence over productivity. Being over doing. This moment with Jesus over the endless list of tasks.

This doesn't mean tasks don't matter. It means they're not the ultimate thing.

The ultimate thing is being present to God's presence. Being attentive to this moment. Being fully here.

I've been Martha most of my life. Busy. Productive. Distracted by preparations. Always doing.

And I've missed moments. Beautiful, sacred, unrepeatable moments because I was too busy to be present.

I'm learning—slowly—to choose Mary's part. To sit. To be. To let the tasks wait while I'm fully present to what matters most.

5. Fixing Your Eyes on Jesus

Hebrews 12:1-2: "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

The race is now. The moment is here. Fix your eyes.

Not wandering eyes that constantly look around at what others have or what might go wrong.

Not backward eyes that live in regret.

Not anxious eyes that strain to see the distant future.

Fixed eyes. On Jesus. On this moment. On the grace that's present right now.

Fixing your eyes isn't passive. It's an active discipline. A choice you make moment by moment.

Choosing to see this moment—not as a means to an end, but as the place where God is present.

Choosing to focus on what you can control—your response, your attitude, your obedience—and release what you can't.

Choosing to look at Jesus instead of at the waves. At truth instead of at fear. At grace instead of at guilt.

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)

Each of the devil's three temptations was an invitation to abandon the present moment:

First temptation: "Turn these stones to bread." In other words: Escape this moment's discomfort. Why trust the Father's provision when you can solve it yourself right now?

Second temptation: "Throw yourself down and angels will save you." In other words: Force tomorrow's provision into today. Make God prove He'll be faithful in the future by manufacturing a crisis now.

Third temptation: "Bow down and I'll give you all the kingdoms." In other words: Skip the process. Take the future today. Bypass the cross and grab the crown right now.

Every temptation pulled Jesus out of present trust—toward immediate relief, manufactured proof, or future shortcuts.

And every response anchored Jesus back 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 was: fast, trust, wait. So Jesus stayed present to that word.

This is the pattern for living in the moment: present trust defeats future anxiety. Moment-by-moment obedience overcomes the temptation to escape discomfort or control what's next.

The Wayfarer Moment

The shift from living in anxiety to living in the moment changed everything for me.

For years, I lived in two time zones: yesterday and tomorrow. I carried regrets from the past and anxieties about the future. The only time zone I wasn't living in was the present.

And I was exhausted. Haunted by what I'd done wrong. Terrified of what might go wrong. Never fully present to what was actually happening.

Then I encountered this simple phrase: "This moment is enough."

At first, I didn't believe it. How could this moment be enough? There's so much to fix, so much to plan, so much to worry about.

But slowly, I began to practice presence. Small things at first.

Noticing my breath. Really tasting my food. Looking people in the eye. Listening without already planning my response.

And I discovered something remarkable: when I was fully present, anxiety loosened its grip. When I focused on this moment, the weight of yesterday and tomorrow lifted—at least for a while.

I started asking myself: What does faithfulness look like right now? Not tomorrow. Not in the big picture. Right now.

And the answer was always simpler than I expected. Love this person. Do this task. Trust this truth. Take this next step.

I began practicing what Brother Lawrence called "the practice of the presence of God." Simple prayers throughout the day. Pausing to notice grace. Training my attention to return to this moment, this breath, this opportunity to be present.

I'm still learning. My mind still wanders to yesterday's failures and tomorrow's fears. But more and more, I'm able to return. To this moment. To this breath. To this sufficient grace.

Because this moment really is enough. Not because it's perfect. But because God is present in it.

His grace is here. His love is active. His strength is available.

And that's all I need.

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: Living in the Moment

[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]

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.

[Final Chorus]

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

- God's name is "I AM"—present tense, not past or future. He meets you in this moment, not in yesterday's regrets or tomorrow's anxieties. This moment is where His presence and grace are available.
- Sufficient grace for today is enough. Like manna in the wilderness, God's grace is given daily. Don't hoard yesterday's grace or borrow tomorrow's worry—receive what's here, now.
- Presence over productivity. Mary chose the better part—sitting at Jesus' feet—while Martha stressed over serving. Being with God matters more than doing for God.
- Fix your eyes on Jesus, not the waves. Hebrews 12:2 urges you to focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. When you look at circumstances, you sink. When you look at Him, you walk on water.

Reflections for the Road

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? 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" and tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow, what does that mean for this moment right now?

3. What does "fixing your eyes on Jesus" look like practically for you today? Not wandering eyes that constantly look around. Not backward eyes living in regret. Not anxious eyes straining to see the distant future. Fixed eyes. On Jesus. On this moment. What will you do when your mind wanders to past or future?

4. Read Luke 10:38-42 slowly—Mary and Martha. 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?

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.

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.

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Out of the Swamp: How I found Truth (Epilogue: The Road Ahead)

You've journeyed from swamp to water's edge to unforced rhythms. You've named your struggle, cried out in prayer, let something die, and discovered that dying to self changes everything.

You've been washed at the water's edge, learning what it means to live in the shadow of grace, receiving what you could never earn, and digging deeper into healing.

And you've begun to walk in the unforced rhythms of grace—sending roots deep, discovering redemption's story woven through your life, learning that nothing is wasted, and living fully present in this moment.

But here's the truth I need you to hear before you close this book:

This isn't the end. It's the beginning.

The Christian life isn't about arriving at some final destination where everything is fixed and all questions are answered. It's about walking with Jesus—day by day, moment by moment, breath by breath.

There will be days when you feel like you're back in the swamp. When old patterns resurface. When shame whispers that you haven't really changed.

On those days, remember: you're not starting over. You're continuing forward. The work God began in you, He is faithful to complete (Philippians 1:6).

There will be days when grace feels distant. When you're exhausted from trying to live up to standards you were never meant to carry.

But let me tell you something I've learned from this side of the journey—something I couldn't see when I was in the depths of my crisis:

There's a difference between THE SWAMP and swamps.

THE SWAMP—capital letters, the big one—that's what this book is about. That was the swamp that tried to take me down and out for good, for the rest of my life. That was the decade-long journey you've just read about. The moral failure. The community rejection. The soul-exhaustion so deep I thought I'd never find my way out. That was THE SWAMP.

But now that I'm in a different place, I realize something crucial: as long as we are living and breathing in this life, we will always be called back to swamps.

Not THE SWAMP. But swamps.

Lowercase swamps. Smaller swamps. Swamps that might show up monthly, weekly, or during some seasons of life, even daily. Times when we're soul-tired again. When we slip into old patterns. When we feel disconnected from God and ourselves. When we're tempted to put the mask back on and perform.

And here's what you need to hear: You don't have to lose hope.

Because the very same things that took me years—even a decade—to practice and experience can be yours in shorter cycles.

The truth I learned about prayer? You can apply it today when you face a swamp this week.

The grace I discovered at the water's edge? You can return there tomorrow when shame resurfaces.

The unforced rhythms that took me years to learn? You can practice them now, today, this moment.

The Truth still stands. God is still in control of our BIG SWAMPS and our little swamps. He's here for you—in the decade-long crisis and in the Tuesday afternoon discouragement.

And we still don't have to do it alone.

So when you feel like you're back in the swamp—and you will feel that way sometimes—pause and ask yourself: Is this THE SWAMP, or is this a swamp?

If it's THE SWAMP, a crisis-level breakdown that requires intensive healing and radical transformation, then this book is your companion. Read it again. Work through the reflection questions. Reach out for help. Apply what took me years to learn. Don't walk alone.

But if it's a lowercase swamp—one of those recurring struggles, those familiar patterns, those moments when you lose your footing—then you already have what you need. You know the way to the water's edge. You know how to pray honestly. You know where to find grace. You know the rhythms that bring you back to center.

You don't have to spend a decade in every swamp you encounter.

The same God who met me in THE SWAMP meets you in the swamps. The same grace that pulled me through the decade-long darkness is available for your daily struggles. The same truth that transformed my life works in shorter cycles, in smaller moments, in the everyday challenges of following Jesus.

On those days when you're feeling overcome, come back to the water's edge. Let grace wash over you again. It's not a one-time event—it's a daily returning to the truth of who you are in Christ.

There will be days when the rhythms feel forced. When life speeds up and you lose your footing in the chaos.

On those days, hear Jesus' invitation again: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The rhythms are always unforced. The striving is always unnecessary. He is always enough.

What Now?

If you're wondering what to do next, here are a few suggestions:

1. Go back through the "Reflections for the Road" questions. Don't rush. Sit with each one. Journal. Pray. Be honest with God and with yourself.
2. Practice one thing from this book consistently. Maybe it's the Daily Examen from Chapter 11. Maybe it's breath prayers throughout your day. Maybe it's naming your swamp and bringing it to God in honest prayer. Pick one. Do it. Let it become a rhythm.
3. Find a community. This journey isn't meant to be walked alone. Find people who will listen without judgment, who will speak truth in love, who will remind you of grace when you forget.
4. Listen to the songs. Music has a way of reaching places words alone can't touch. Let these songs become part of your prayer life, your worship, your remembering.
5. Keep walking. Some days you'll sprint. Some days you'll crawl. Some days you'll sit still and rest. All of it is part of the journey. Just don't stop moving toward Jesus.

A Final Word

I don't know where you are right now. Maybe you're in the deepest part of the swamp, and this book felt like a lifeline. Maybe you're at the water's edge, tentatively stepping into grace. Maybe you're learning the rhythms and discovering that life with Jesus is better than you imagined.

Wherever you are, know this:

God isn't finished with you.

Grace is still sufficient.

This moment is still enough.

And the One who called you out of the swamp is faithful to walk with you every step of the way.

Keep walking, wayfarer.

The journey is just beginning.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

— Philippians 1:6

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To Jesus: Thank You for meeting me in the darkest places and refusing to let me stay there. This book is a testimony to Your faithfulness, Your patience, and Your relentless love. Everything I have, everything I am, is because of grace.

To my family: Thank you for walking the journey with me and for demonstrating that in the economy of God, nothing is wasted.

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To you, the reader: Thank you for picking up this book. Thank you for being willing to do the hard work of spiritual formation. Thank you for being a fellow wayfarer on this journey toward wholeness.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

— Galatians 2:20

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About the Author

Skyler Thomas is a songwriter, writer, and wayfarer who believes that honest stories and grace-filled truth have the power to change lives.

Born and raised across many states of the U.S. of A., Skyler has spent a lifetime exploring the intersection of faith, music, and spiritual formation. Through personal struggles and profound encounters with God's grace, Skyler discovered that transformation doesn't happen through striving, but through surrender to the unforced rhythms of grace.

This book represents over a dozen years of journaling, songwriting, and wrestling with what it means to follow Jesus in the midst of real life—messy, broken, beautiful, and redeemed.

Skyler's music and writing can be found at skylerthomas.com, where you can access all the songs featured in this book, read additional blog posts, and connect with a growing community of wayfarers learning to walk in grace.

When not writing or making music, Skyler enjoys family and friends building memories.

Connect with Skyler:

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"These songs and stories aren't just mine—they're ours. I'm simply putting words to what so many of us have experienced but struggle to name. My prayer is that somewhere in these pages, you find your own story reflected back to you, and you hear God whisper: 'I see you. I know you. And I'm not done with you yet.'"