



The Survivor's

Guide to

Surviving

The Bible

This guide was born out of years of weekly meetings between myself, Pastor Josh Causey, and minister Megan Kelly. As a survivor, wrestling through the obstacles I found while reading the Bible identified the need for a tool which survivors could have with them when reading the scriptures. The list of scriptures herein is certainly not exhaustive, as they are only the ones that bothered me, and not even *all* of those.

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The artwork on the cover and the ransomed daughter design was done freehand by Amanda Pinder of Life & Lemons Design on Etsy, a truly talented artist, solid follower of Jesus, and a great friend.

The title words design was done by Sarah Smith, a sweet disciple of Christ who attends our church.

No author is listed on the cover because the words came through conversation and it is all for God's glory, not ours.

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I am always available for questions or comments. If you are wrestling with your faith because of your experiences, I would love to help (for real). Email me at SurvivorsGuideBible@gmail.com

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**dedicated to all
who have suffered
the horror that is
human trafficking.**

INTRODUCTION

I always believed in God, I just wasn't always sure that He loved me, or that the cross could really cover ALL my sins, or that it was possible I could be washed white as snow. When I would read the Bible, I would avoid or skip over certain verses that I thought condemned me or made me the exception to His love. I was afraid to ask questions about these verses, because I was afraid of the answers. I just kind of surface accepted the general things church people said about God loving me and hoped maybe somehow it could be true - but deep down I didn't really believe it could be.

Josh taught me that for every scripture, there is an explanation and/or interpretation that is consistent with the character of God, so there is no question I need be afraid to ask. Megan pushed me over and over to read the Bible as a way of God communicating to me. Despite all my eye rolling, she persisted in encouraging me, and one day the scriptures opened for me. That's the best I can explain it, and my life with God has never been the same.

I want you to know that it is okay to just stick to the New Testament for a while. It took me a long time to realize that if there's no fruit in something, it's okay to put it aside. At one point, I was ranting about something in one of the Old Testament prophets' books and Josh and Meg just looked at me and said, "stop reading the old prophets". They did not tell me that because anything in those books contradicts God's love - they told me that because there was no fruit coming out of my reading them because of where I was at in my journey. I have learned that sometimes you just need to put your crap aside and take the advice of the people you trust.

I just hate that the enemy would use God's Word to keep people from God by twisting the meaning. **While there is mystery and hard truth in the Bible, there is NO scripture that contradicts God's character nor His love for us.** If you think you have one and it is not resolved in this guide, send it to me and give me a chance to prove it.



I painted this a couple years ago. It represents how the window I view the world through was cracked and broken by the things that happened to me in my childhood. All of us have a world view - a window - that is built by our experiences and relationships, and every situation we face is seen through that window. The truth gets twisted by the cracks and broken places, or hidden by the dirt. Nobody picked out their window. We are born with a window that has one big crack in it from the start; we are born spiritually dead. The things that are done to us cause more damage and we do not see things as they really are.

So much of what Jesus taught was basically, “You think the world is that, but I tell you it is this”. The picture on the cover is an illustration of how the scriptures “fix” our window, allowing us to see the Kingdom, the real Truth.

So much gets lost in translation from one language to another, and an additional layer of difficulty is added when moving from an ancient language to a modern one. I work with a Cuban who is learning English. He tells me he understands about 1 in 4 words. A lot can get lost in those other 3 words. Then there are phrases we say that do not really make sense if you go by the definitions of the individual words. We know what they mean because we grew up speaking the language. There are even differences in English based on what part of the country you live in. These same kind of issues exist in Bible translations. Sometimes, in order to get the meaning of a verse, you have to know the context - who wrote it, who were they writing to, what was the culture like at the time, etc.

Also, it is okay to read *The Message*. If you find it helpful, stick with that as long as necessary. It is not a word-for-word translation, it is a paraphrase from the original languages, and it is reliable in the meaning it conveys.

This guide will be ongoing. New editions will be available each time enough new verses are added. You can download the PDF at www.survivingthebible.com

Don't settle for being “okay” or “functional”!! There is so much more life than that - abundant life!

GOD LOVES US!!!

—Debbie

"GOD CANNOT GIVE
US A HAPPINESS AND
PEACE APART FROM
HIMSELF, BECAUSE IT
IS NOT THERE. THERE
IS NO SUCH THING."
-- C. S. LEWIS

KEY CONCEPTS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Love Does Not Make you Pay for It

God already loves you; His love is not in question and does not need to be earned. We do not do things to get Him to love us, instead we do things *because* He loves us and we love Him.

Love is costly, but not in terms of earning. Willing sacrifice is not the same as paying for something. The Romeo pimp is just a scheme; it's anti-God. God is who He says He is - yesterday, today, and forever. He does not change from day to day. His love for you does not change based on your behavior. The pimp's motive is sin and self; God's motive is love and our good.

“The Wicked”

Every time I read “the wicked” in the Bible, my shame said “me”. What the scriptures are talking about is people who are hostile toward God. They are actively rejecting and acting out against Him in rebellion. In the unredeemed, sinful behavior comes from being spiritually dead. In the redeemed Christian, sinful behavior is acting out of your wounds and brokenness, even though you know better. Whenever a verse says, “the wicked”, I literally replace it in my head with “the ones who reject God”.

And

Our God is a god of and, not or. What I mean is that He is three *and* He is one. He is 100% in control (sovereign) *and* we are 100% operating out of free will. Jesus became 100% human *and* He was still 100% God.

We tend to think everything has to be one or the other. We cannot even hold two things in our mind at once. God is so much “other” - He is not a finite, limited, human being.

God the Father

I used to think God the Father was mad at me and wanted to destroy me. Jesus was the loving, older brother who stood between me and the Father, and took the beating for me. I thought that was the Gospel. When I would go awhile without doing anything wrong, I would start thinking maybe the Father would start to like me. Then I would inevitably screw up and think He was mad and had His face turned away in disgust.

What I was really doing was projecting what my earthly father was like onto God. A lot of us who have had not-so-great dads tend to do that. It is backwards. I cannot start with my dad and judge all fathers as dangerous and bad, including God the Father. I have to start with God. I have to get to know Him and see what a perfect Father looks like, then I can look back at my dad and say, “What the crap was that? Because he was not acting at all like God; he was not being a good father.”

A lot of us have problems with God being “Father”. It is okay to stick with Jesus. You do not have to address God as Father; He is not going to get His feelings hurt. Believe me, He understands.

Suffering

This is where we tend to balk - if God knows what is best, why do we suffer? Sorry, but I do not have THE answer.

As survivors, we have suffered tremendously, most often at the hands of someone else. **I do not, in any way, discount any of your suffering, and I believe each person must wrestle through this issue personally with Jesus.** For myself, I have landed at God is all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing. Yet, He was willing to come down and suffer alongside us in order to save us. I cannot help but believe it must all be worth it if He chose the cross, never having done any wrong. There is also something in the idea that sharing in Christ's suffering connects to Him on a deeper level. I still wrestle with some of this stuff and I do not think any person can give another the answers; they must come from Jesus. I can however, point you to some resources that have helped me tremendously. They are listed in the back of this guide, but here are a couple of awesome quotes:

“Our Head left glory and came down to this traumatized world. He became flesh like us; he literally got in our skin. He did not numb or flee the atrocities of this world or of our hearts.” — Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*

“If God is no exception – if even He has suffered – then we cannot say He doesn't understand, or that His sovereignty over suffering is being exercised in a cruel and unfeeling way, or that He is a cold king who lets things happen without caring about what we are going through. Since even He has not kept Himself immune from our pain, we can trust Him.” — Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*

Submission of My Will to God's Will

This does not mean that my will does not matter. It is about God's infinite perspective versus my limited perspective. What I want might hurt me - I do not know that, but He does. Submission is simply admitting that God knows what is best way more than I do. He is outside of time and already knows the outcome. He is able to be objective, whereas we just want to be happy and not feel any pain.

I have found that the longer I walk with Jesus, the more my will tends to match up with His anyway.

Blessing

I want to redefine this word as “anything that makes us more like Christ and/or deepens our relationship with Him”.

Most Christians seem to think it means “anything that feels good and does not hurt”. I have learned that sometimes the hurt **is** the blessing.

Fear of God

This “fear” is awe, reverence, respect, and a deep sense of how good God is. It does not make you withdraw or shrink back, it is the kind that makes you listen to whatever He says. You hang on every word. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis calls Him “not safe, but good”, meaning God is all-powerful but will never use it to harm us.

Obedience Even When You Do Not Understand

The answer here is the same as submission - His infinite perspective over our limited one. Obeying God is trusting Him. It is not that He does not care when we do not understand, there are some things we just cannot understand. It is the same as when a one-year-old needs surgery. The parent loves the child but does not explain to her why she has to have surgery, simply because the child is incapable of understanding.

In trafficking, we obeyed out of fear and a desire to earn love and to belong. With God, we obey because we **are** loved and we **do** belong.

Paid the Price for Us

I hear “price”, I think “money”. In places where verses say “paid the price for us” or times when Christians phrase the concept of the Gospel that way, replace it with “obtained for us”. He obtained our freedom for us - at great cost to Himself in blood and suffering, not money.

Hurt is Not Harm

This is one of those hard truths. However, that does not make it any less true. “Harm” would be separation from the love of God. Physical death it is not harm.

God does not always protect us from hurt, but **He always protects us from harm.**

**"HE SET HIS LOVE UPON
US BEFORE WE WERE
BORN, WITHOUT ASKING
OUR PERMISSION; IT IS
ETERNALLY TOO LATE TO
ARGUE WITH HIM ON
THIS ISSUE."**

- MALCOLM SMITH

HARD TO SURVIVE VERSES

Matthew 1:1-6

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hebron, and Hebron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obedience by Ruth, and Obedient the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.”

This verse is here to encourage you. In biblical times, in Israel, women were not considered important when it came to bloodlines. Listing four women in Jesus’ genealogy was a weird thing to do, especially if the purpose was to provide evidence of His “pedigree”, so to speak.

God is not random. These four women are listed here purposely, and they are not women who would have been considered “upstanding members of society”. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and tricked her father-in-law into getting her pregnant. Rahab was a prostitute from Jericho. “The wife of Uriah” committed adultery with David. Ruth was an outsider.

So Jesus’ great-great-....great-great-grandmother had been a prostitute. And this is not hidden, it is in the first paragraph of the New Testament. We are image-bearers of God. We are redeemed. We are His beloved.

**YOU
ARE A
CHILD
OF
GOD**

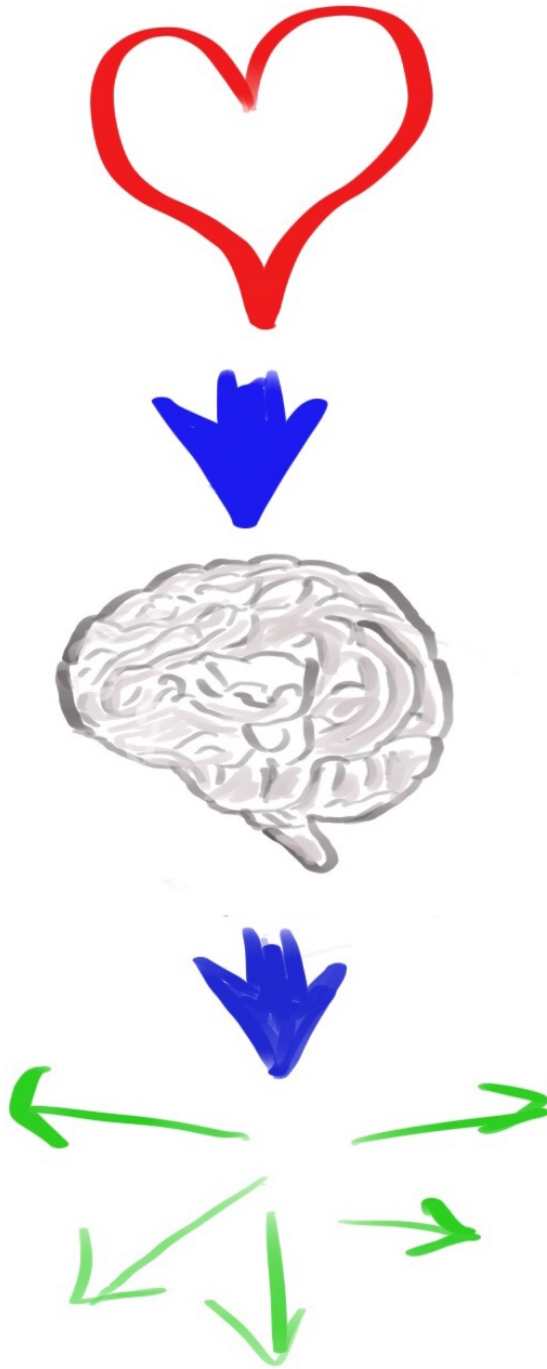
Matthew 5:27-28

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

This verse is not about adultery, primarily. The real focus here is on the heart, which is at the center of all Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God. The whole culture in biblical days was hung up on actions instead of from where those actions come. The whole sermon on the mount, Jesus taught, "You heard this.., but I say this.." He was debunking their beliefs.

The issue is the heart. **In the Kingdom of God, we do not use people, even in our minds.** That is not what God has for us. The real problem is not behavior modification, it is people's hearts that need to change, and the behavior that reflects God's character just naturally comes along behind that. In this verse, Jesus is trying to make them see that the real problem is seeing women as objects to be used. He is making them think.

We are free from sin, but we *learn* to walk free, and He changes our character. If we do commit adultery, or any sin, we confess it and receive the forgiveness of Christ. Sanctification is progressive, where the longer we walk with Jesus, the more our hearts become like His.



Mark 7:15, 20-23

“There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Labeling a tree as a lemon tree is not what makes it one; the lemons it produces are what make it a lemon tree. The action demonstrates the person's heart.

The Pharisees were intent on modifying the behavior, but Jesus is saying that it is a brokenness problem. The heart is what matters rather than the behavior. **The heart determines thoughts, which determine actions**, just like a lemon tree grows branches that produce lemons. The behaviors He lists are symptoms of a deeper problem. The person is broken, not evil. The evil label is on the behavior, not the person. Unlike us, God has the ability to separate behavior from the person. He can love you without loving what you did. This is the whole counsel of the Bible. Our identity as saints does not change when our outward behavior does not line up with it.

We were already broken (born into sin), and what was done to us has complicated it. What is broken in the heart is what leads us to think sin is the best or only option we have.

Luke 9:23

“And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’”

Following Jesus will cost us everything, and everything it costs us is for our good. Cost and sacrifice are different from pay and earn. My daughter has cost me, yet I have sacrificed for her out of my love for her. I do not look at that cost as a burden, nor do I regret any of it - I would do it all again and more. Our relationship with Christ starts with Him loving us so much that He came down into the middle of our mess and sacrificed everything for us.

Coercion is evil and anti-God. God is as He presents himself. He is consistent: the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Whereas with a Romeo pimp, it is a ruse. He morphs and changes constantly.

We do not earn God's love, we start out with it. Nothing we do earns it or loses it. Obeying God is trusting in His love for us, that He wills only good for us, and His way brings us the most good. We obey because we love Him.

John 14:15

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

What is Jesus referring to when He says "keep my commandments"? From God's perspective, if you say you know Him, but you do not love, then you do not really know Him. He is talking about love here, not about following rules.

It is almost an anti-religion thing, like anti-Pharisees - saying you know God but just following a bunch of rules and not loving people. It does not mean if you break a rule, you do not love Him.

**YOU
ARE
WANTED**



[Pause]

Let's talk about "the lists" for a minute. It can sometimes seem like all Paul does is harp on behaviors - especially sexual immorality. We have to remember that these books - Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians, etc... are all letters from Paul to individual churches or people. Paul had no way of knowing that his letters would ever be read by anyone other than the people to whom they were written. He is not repeating himself, trying to emphasize, nor beat us down about how bad these things are. He is duplicating one teaching for a lot of different groups of people. It is like a preacher traveling throughout the country giving the same sermon in each place - not a preacher in one place giving the same sermon over and over.

Romans 1:24

"God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves"

When we sin, it is not the act that matters but the heart behind the act. God did not give up on them, but rather He let them have their own way. Unchecked sin progresses worse and worse and worse. The wheels come off the more you choose self over God. He will let you choose (free will). This is a case study of what sin does - He lets it run its course. He did not give up on them.

It is a letter - the whole plot line is going toward the gospel. **He will not force His way on you, even in your rebellion.** Like a parent when a kid pitches a fit, the parent stays with them to be there when they are done. He refuses to endorse sin because it leads to death.

Romans 6:16-23

"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness ... for just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When we read "slave" we think of slavery like what existed in America. What Paul is talking about is not that. A slave in biblical times was a "bondservant" working to pay their debt and to buy their freedom. Trafficking is a sin - this passage does not contradict that.

The purpose of this passage is that the heart of the one we are tied to makes all the difference.

Our lives and our behavior do not instantly, automatically

change when we become a Christian. Our brains were in essence programmed by our experiences; we only know one way to respond. Even when we are brought into freedom, we still have not learned a new response to things. We have to give ourselves time to reprogram our minds with the truth.

When a caterpillar emerges from its cocoon, it is a completely new creature. The butterfly can choose to walk around, eat leaves, and never fly, but that does not make it a caterpillar. We are a new creation when we believe in Jesus; we just do not always act like it.

Romans 8:28

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Some circumstances will never be “good”, but Jesus will redeem them in bringing about good from them. A verse I think works better for us would be Isaiah 45:3, *“I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.”* Some of the treasures He has given me from the darkness are:

- a passion for the marginalized and wounded
- a fierce protectiveness over children
- a deep empathy for other people’s pain
- a passion against injustice
- strength to endure
- discernment
- and most importantly, a deeper connection with Jesus

Romans 12:1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

This verse has nothing to do with having to allow someone to do whatever they want with your body. This is not about our bodies, it is about our lives. Our entire life is continually presenting our mind, will, money, time, etc. on the altar as saying: “This is what You are worth to me”. Everything is worshipping the Lord. In this passage, “body” = “life”. Worship is not linked to the temple anymore, it’s 24/7. We do not worship only in a particular place. Instead, we worship everywhere all the time.

“Holy and acceptable” is being clothed in righteousness and our actions being in line with that. It is a choice that Jesus is worth all of this.

Romans 13:13-14

“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

“Flesh” does not equal “body”. It is not just physical, as in “the body needs food, etc.”. In the Bible, the word flesh is deeper than that. Dallas Willard says that ““Flesh” in the Biblical usage is not the same thing as the body — it is the merely natural powers of a human being, based in the human body. In Galatians 5, Paul described “the deeds of

the flesh” when natural human impulses and abilities are allowed to be the rule of life.” It is what comes naturally to us as a broken people, whatever makes us feel good, our “default” behavior. It is our natural inclination, broken by sinful nature and what was done to us by others.

It is like when you walk through tall grass in the same place over and over; it tramples the grass down and makes a path that is just easier to always choose to walk down.

“Often we want to do what is good, but are prepared without thinking about it to do what is evil. (This is true when sin lives in our bodily members as **habit**) It becomes ingrained, not only in thoughts and images, but also in a person’s body and is therefore habitually carried out.” — Dallas Willard

“Jesus’ Gospel: Re-think how you’re living your life in light of your opportunity to live in God’s Kingdom today and forever by putting your confidence in Him. (Of course, Jesus’ gospel includes forgiveness of sins, liberating the oppressed, and being faithful to a community of Christ-followers.)” — Dallas Willard

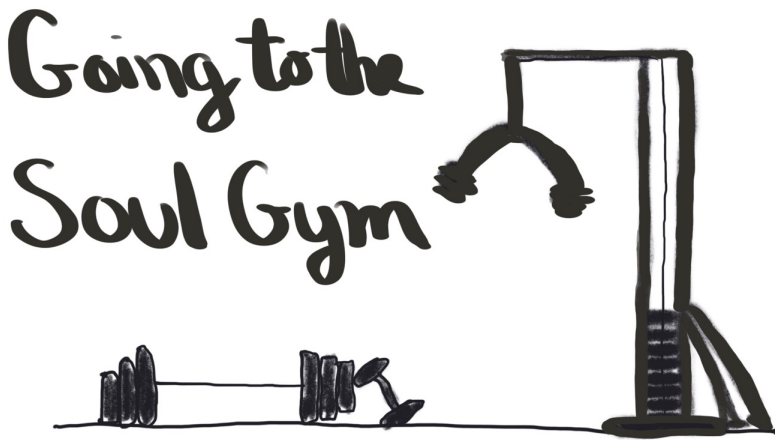
“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh” means to plan for holiness, not selfishness. If we want to change our eating habits, but we do not plan, get rid of our junk food, and buy healthy food, we will end up doing the same old eating pattern(default).

We can replace “walk properly as in the daytime” with “walk in the light”. We can cultivate habits that are good for us and not harmful to us. Always remember Jesus is making us into who He designed us to be, but it is progressive sanctification, it does not happen all at once.

Our old sin nature has been dealt a death blow and is bleeding out, but we keep slipping it food and prolonging its death.

The old way is familiar to us and takes less effort. That is why we keep doing it.

Planning for holiness is practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, getting into the Word, time alone with God, listening for Him, fasting, worshipping, and studying. These are the things Jesus did. They are following Jesus into His own practices, intentionally placing yourself into the pathway of God's love, as a means of training yourself for godliness and growing in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We do not earn



"GRACE IS NOT
OPPOSED TO EFFORT, IT
IS OPPOSED TO
EARNING."

-- DALLAS WILLARD

1 Cor 5:9-13

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler - not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you."

This is a letter to the church in Corinth that Paul helped start and pastored. Paul is dealing with incest that happened within the church - the person committing incest willfully. He is also quoting the Old Testament, which is harshly worded. Verse 2 in this chapter is to the church - that they are just letting it happen, passively endorsing the man who has done this. Verse 5 uses his sin to show him that he is spiritually dead. The whole church will feel this. Verse 9 is about how they were looking the other way on known issues and pretending it was not a thing. Verse 12 is looking at each others' lives, staying on top of willful sin.

This passage is dealing with a church sin pattern problem - about their passivity in dealing with it. It is not about how bad people who sin sexually are.

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

This passage always seemed to say that prostitutes were the lowest life on Earth, and it did not seem to leave room for redemption. So much gets lost in translation and in speaking to a different culture and time.

Paul was making the point that they were saying everything was ok to do because they were outside the law in Christ. It is an illustration. We can replace “prostitute” with “pornography” or “adultery” or “sex outside of the marriage covenant”.

Sex is this really good thing that God created, yet it is very powerful and creates a bond between two people. Outside of covenant marriage, you are not ready for this powerful a bond. Once again, sin has taken something good and distorted it. In sexual sin, there is a spiritual connection that happens. We cannot pretend it is not there. However, the bond is not irreversible, nor unhealable, no matter how many there are.

God can take and heal all of those bonds. Take them to Him and just tell Him: “Help me know what to do with all these emotional, spiritual bonds”.

Adultery is going against the bond you made in marriage. When you get a divorce and remarry, you admit, confess, and acknowledge Jesus’ forgiveness of breaking that bond, as well as receive grace and forgiveness. There is the same grace and forgiveness for a survivor. Are we bonded with every John? Yes, however, that is not outside of Jesus’ power to heal us and break those connections. We cannot pretend they are not there. First, Jesus can heal, redeem, and restore everything. The power of sexual union is why it cuts so deep into us, has a more widespread web, and is stronger than any other sin. The power comes from there being a union created there.

The bond is good and holy as created in a marriage covenant. Outside of the marriage covenant, the intimacy makes a bond that is harmful and distorted. It is important that sexual sin be treated differently because of this, but it is still covered by Jesus. It is not outside the realm of His forgiveness.

How much does consent affect the creation of the bond? We do not really know. It is possible that the act alone (like in rape) does not make the bond. We just do not know for sure, so we can admit that there is some unknown of how this applies in cases of abuse, whether it is rape, incest, or prostitution. It does explain some of the trauma bonding, like Stockholm syndrome. Yet, just as with anything, when we want freedom from sin or a source of shame, we speak it, acknowledge what happened, and apply the forgiveness of Jesus to it. As a survivor, I do not do this for each individual bond. I just acknowledge that I have all these

bonds for which I do not know what to do. The Johns took something from us. Jesus can break whatever bonds exist and heal whatever damage they have caused.

In Corinth, sexual sin was rampant and the way that idols were worshipped. They were very loose sexually, and Paul was setting up boundaries for the church there. The reason he is saying to flee from sexual immorality is because it is so powerful and damaging.

Here, Paul is probably talking about a temple prostitute - for them it was tied to idol worship and deeply offensive to the Lord. We may read this passage and think of a “regular” prostitute, but for the Corinthians, it connected more to idol worship. In the verses before this he was talking about the food sacrificed to idols. He was trying to show them you can eat that food or not eat it, it has no effect. That is not the case for the temple prostitute. While you do not bond with the steak, there is a bond created in sex with the temple prostitute. Some of them were using these women as if bodily sin did not matter, but with sex it does matter. Corinth and Ephesus were both known for that kind of thing.

That good bond between a husband and wife reflects being joined in spirit with the Lord, so it does not make sense to “join” with something not of Him. It is a word that carries such a large amount of baggage. It is not talking about the people involved; it just means that if you knew you were sacred would you do something sinful with the body? That is the whole point of the text.

1 Corinthians 7:23

**“You were bought with a price; do not become
bondservant of men.”**

Bought = rescued from the domain of darkness.

God gave the ransom for us, which was His own life. It is relational, not a business transaction. **We are ransomed daughters and sons, not purchased possessions.**



2 Corinthians 5:14

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died”

The trigger word here is control; if we shift our focus to the words surrounding "control" in that scripture, it loses its power. Think good versus evil. If we talk about good being in control or evil being in control, it stops being about “control” and becomes about what or who is doing the controlling.

Christ’s agape love is not romantic love. In Luke 19:43, the same word is translated as “hems in”, and in Luke 8:45, it is translated as “surrounds”. It has an aggressive tone to it, yet the motive of Christ, the one who is surrounding, compelling, controlling, and hemming us in, changes everything about the verse. In *The Message*, it is translated as “Christ’s love has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do.”

you
are
loved

2 Corinthians 12:21

“I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced”

When I read this and similar verses, I would feel despair. How does one who has been prostituted repent “of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality they have practiced”? How could I even know what belonged to me and what did not? What does it even look like to have so much, so many you cannot even count them, and some you do not even remember? This verse reeked of hopelessness to me until we talked about it.

First, it is not quantitative. I do not have to repent for each act. A pound of lead and a pound of feathers weigh the same. One thousand times and one time are equal. Adam and Eve were alive physically and spiritually, and then dead spiritually, so whether a dead person commits a sin once or a million times it is the same. He or she is still outside of the Garden of Eden, no matter how much or how little they sin. Original sin blankets us all. Cain and Able were both spiritually dead.

Not only is it not quantitative, but also, Jesus’ blood completely covers whatever that quantity may be. The blood covers all of it **without exception**. Quantity matters in terms of our gratitude and recognition of how long and deep and wide His love is. It matters to us more than it matters to Him. In other words, from God to me, quantity doesn’t matter, but from me to God, it does matter.

We do not repent of abuse. Of all the things we may have done wrong, that is not one of them. In terms of atonement, Jesus' blood covers what was done - as it does for all sin - yet, the sin belongs to the abusers, not to us.

Galatians 5:16-21

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

This passage is about how the Galatians are using their freedom. Are they using it to please themselves or God? It is not only their motive going into it, but also, their state afterwards matters. Is there conviction over having done it? Or are they not caring and planning to do it again?

If you big picture it, flesh produces death and Spirit produces life. If you *only* produce death, then the Spirit is not active in you. It is helpful if you think outside of the

examples. What does the Spirit produce? Life or death? Walk by the Spirit, you produce life. If you produce death, you are not living by the Spirit. In verse 24, we see that we have to belong to Christ, and if we do, that flesh is crucified and dying a slow death. We still choose ourselves at times - we are not living from the Spirit in those moments. These things are inconsistent with who the Spirit is in you. You are free from these things if you are walking in the Spirit.

There is a difference between people who are wrestling with something and people who have given themselves over to it. You can replace the word “do” in the last verse with the word “practice” - meaning make a practice of doing such things regularly as a way of life, giving yourself over to these things. It is not a one-and-done kind of thing. If this sin is someone’s way of life and not just something with which they struggle, then there is a question of whether or not they are actually saved.

Galatians 6:7-8

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

This is about salvation, not sanctification. Sow = Invest. Flesh = Self-reliance. It is about choosing God instead of choosing self. It does **not** mean if you slip, you go to hell.

**"BRING IT ALL TO
THE TABLE.
THERE'S NOTHING HE
AIN'T SEEN BEFORE."
-- ZACH WILLIAMS**

Ephesians 5:3-5

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Verses 3, 4, and 5 are all basically talking about sexuality. It is possible the Ephesians were telling dirty jokes. What is our speech supposed to be doing? Instead of jokes, thanksgiving. Our speech should be used to uphold and encourage one another.

In verse 11, “they” is the darkness of the city and evil around them. Sexual immorality is woven into the fabric of the town. Paul is giving them guidelines on how to distance themselves from it - do not joke about it, be appropriately counter-cultural, and do not be anti-cultural. It would be like your pastor giving you instructions on witnessing in Las Vegas. It is not saying you cannot talk about what has happened to you or what you have been through. If you talk about sex all the time, it is almost the same as participating in it.

He is trying to help them know how to exist in this culture without it impacting them but with them impacting it for Christ. It is hard to do. The details apply to the people in Ephesus to whom he is writing - the big picture we can apply to ourselves.

Phillipians 2:3

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

This is not saying "other people matter but I do not". It is saying that we **all** matter as image bearers, and we are to love one another well. When someone has a need, we help them out of love, like Jesus did. Do not ignore the next verse: "let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others".

Philippians 4:8

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

This passage is about the focal point of your mind. There is beauty and purity all around us that is worthy of praise. The spirit of this verse is, “What are you filling your mind with?” Recognize God's activity around you. It is not about people, it is about God. What is worthy of praise points always to Him.

Pure - bad is impure, good is pure. Not necessarily sex. Impure = contamination (anything that doesn't belong there). White sheets look dingy when placed next to new snow!

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God”

Sanctification is to continue to grow. This is where Christ is taking you, and the kind of person He is making you into. God is making you into the kind of person whose sexuality plays the proper role. He wants this kind of life for you. On those days you are not where you want to be, it is encouraging that this is where you are headed. It is progress, not perfection. It is never an automatic jump from only knowing the passions of the flesh to learning to walk by the Spirit.

It is especially hard to be the “odd-man out”, surrounded by a culture that is all about the passions of the flesh.

**YOU ARE
VALUED**

1 Timothy 2:11-14

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor”

This passage is a call to provide educational opportunities for women. It has to do with *correcting* the oppression of women, not adding to it. It is contextual: Paul is writing to Timothy, who is in the church at Ephesus.

In Ephesus, women were oppressed and not allowed to learn at all. The reason he says "the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" and "women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire" is because back then in the temple of Artemis, men worshipped idols by having sex with a temple prostitute (this was a very normal, common practice there). Paul is saying that men should be prayerful and holy, and that women should be recognizably different from temple prostitutes (this is not about prostitution, but about pagan idolatry). The women were being used. He is saying men should not put their hands on these women and women should not be used as a way to worship the false god, Artemis. The braided hair, etc, is how the temple women dressed. In Ephesus, the pagan women were just used and the women at church should look different from these women, because they were not to be used, but valued.

Verse 11 tends to have an emphasis on “be quiet”, but in reality, it is about letting the women learn. Back then the culture would not allow them to learn, so it was groundbreaking for Paul to say this.

In parts of the Middle East today, men and women are separate in public. At church in Paul’s day, the men were taught in an educated language that women were not allowed to learn. The women had no idea what was being taught. Therefore, they would get bored and begin to talk to each other or murmur, which was very disruptive. He is telling the husbands to go home after church and teach their wives what they learned. So “quiet and submissive” here is just so that the men can hear, learn, and later translate it to their wives at home.

"Teach or exercise authority..." is about culture. He has already said to teach them at home. This is about it being a private versus public setting. Teaching the women at home in private was to educate them in a way that was appropriately counter-cultural and not anti-cultural or rebellious.

“Adam first” is challenging the men to take care of the women. **Paul is trying to overcome the gender weirdness, not perpetuate it.**

Eve was not an afterthought, but an intentional giving of a gift. “Helpmate = strong rescuer”

Titus 2:9-10

"Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

The Greek word used here is translated sometimes as slave, sometimes as servant, and sometimes as bondservant, based on different degrees of servitude. A slave conveys absolute ownership. Bondservant is more like an employee relationship where a debt is being worked off. A servant would literally be a person who serves the community.

We have to remember that paying off a debt by becoming someone's bondservant was a very normal practice in biblical times. It was not the same as what we think of when we think of slavery or having a "master".

Whenever I read "submissive" I automatically think I have to give in to whatever they want, even sex. That is not what this verse is saying. The last phrase, "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" means that their conduct should reflect the teachings of Jesus, as this is how the Gospel is spread.

Hebrews 11:31

“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

This section of Hebrews is commonly referred to as “The Hall of Faith”. It lists the giants of our faith, like Abraham, Moses, David, and.... Rahab.

Boom.

Hebrews 13:4

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefined, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Are trafficked people guilty of adultery? In a technical sense, adultery is a married person having sex with anyone other than his or her spouse. So if a trafficked person is married or they knowingly have sex with someone who is married, probably so. It is an *act* of adultery. Yet always remember that it comes down to the intentions of the heart. The reason adultery is such a serious sin is more about the damage that is done to the people involved, than it is how offended God is by it. The married John is the one responsible for the adultery and all the ripples of damage that go out from it. Is the act of sex outside of marriage sin? Yes. So is pride, selfishness, greed, etc.....

There is more damage done by sexual sin because of how powerful sex is. God hates that it hurts His children because He loves us.

1 Peter 2:18-21

“Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps”

Peter is referring to bondservants and/or debtors paying back a debt (not slaves as we think of them). If you owe money to someone who is a jerk, you should still pay that debt. It is not the same as abuse or prostituting, it is more like employees with bosses who are mean.

We are called to Christ-likeness, to be holy as He is holy. We learn this like children learn to write by tracing letters over and over again. Jesus suffered unjustly without sinning. You identify and connect with Jesus in suffering in a deeper way than when you are content.

1 Peter 4:3

“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.”

Hopefully, you already know this, but I did not, so I will say it, just in case. Orgies does not refer to gang rape.

Revelations 21:8

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Revelations 22:15

“Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

In both of these passages, the previous verses talk of the reward for those who have said yes to God. These verses here are just contrasting the ones who reject God from the ones who love Him. They are talking about the end of this reality when all who reject God end up without Him forever.

It is an invitation to come into His kingdom, along with a full disclosure of what will happen to people who choose not to, so that everyone knows just what they are choosing. It is saying this is what a life living by the Spirit looks like versus this is what a life lived by the flesh looks like. You get to choose. There is another option. It does not have to be this way. If you are behaving this way, you are either dead or you are rejecting God. The point is not the behavior patterns, it is the invitation to life.

The people in these lists of sins have separated themselves from God intentionally. They know what they are doing is wrong but decide they are going to do it anyway. They are not “struggling”, or even going to try to fight it. They have given themselves over to it.

Psalm 23:2

“He makes me lie down in green pastures.”

The surface analogy of the shepherd keeping away the predators and pests, making the sheep feel safe enough to lie down and sleep, does not really work for me. Going to bed at night was the most dangerous part of my life as a child.

It would be easy to put my dad in the role of predator and say that God, as my Shepherd, did not protect me from him. But **the lie that says God does not love me is the real predator** in my story.

The green pasture is not analogous to circumstances. God working in my life to mold my character to be Christ-like, to make my heart like His, is the ultimate good and the greenest of pastures.

Proverbs 13:24

“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”

This is not advocating abuse of any kind. It has been misinterpreted and used incorrectly for years. “Spare the rod, spoil the child” is not from scripture. It probably morphed from this scripture in Proverbs, but it is not a direct quote.

Think of it from the perspective of discipline (coming from the word disciple). It is training, guidance, and correction rather than punishment. When children are little, spanking is what they can understand, but as they get older, discipline stops being physical. It is discipleship that moves into being conversational as they get older. So discipleship for younger children is a spanking, but spanking in anger is never okay, it has to tie to discipline which ties to discipleship.

"*Whoever spares the rod hates his son*" is talking about little kids. "Rod" is shepherding language. The rod was used to guide, protect, and establish authority with the sheep. The verse is actually saying that you do not really love your child if you do not discipline him or her. "*Spare the rod*" is talking about withholding correction, not the opposite extreme of pouring violence on your child. *The Message* says "A refusal to correct is a refusal to love, love your children by disciplining them."

Heb 12:6 says it is the child He loves that He disciplines -- discipline is love. Discipline is supposed to be discipleship. The end game, the motive of the parent, is to teach in a way the child understands, toward the bettering of the child.

It is a "why are you doing this" kind of thing. The motive behind abuse is self-centered, all about the abuser - a release for their rage, to make them feel better, or a tool of manipulation to gain something they want. **Abuse is not discipline.** Real discipline is driven by love and will for the child's good.

Exodus 20:12

"Honor your father and mother"

In order to frame this correctly, you first have to establish the role of the 10 Commandments. There are two main purposes to keep in mind: (1) to give them rules that they could not possibly follow, in order to show them that their problem is not outward behavior, but inward spiritual death; and, (2) to keep their behavior in bounds while they were learning the lesson expressed in the first point. So, these are not only mirrors for the soul, but also ways to keep their society from destroying itself. This is why it says to honor your parents "that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." **We need healthy family systems in order to thrive as humans.**

Then comes the term "*honor*" and all that we think that term means. The tendency is to immediately think "obey and do whatever they say" or "respect" and there is room for that understanding. But those things hit their limit. There are times when God says the same thing about kings or government leaders, but of course we are only to obey up to a point, ready to disobey if sin would be the result of our obedience. Think of the story in Daniel chapter 3 about Shadrach and his friends not bowing to the idol. They "honored" the king up to a point, but then had to disobey him in order to obey and honor God. So it is not an absolute term, even though it seems that way, and especially so when you're talking about kids. All that to say, "honor" only goes so far.

This verse is best understood as an ideal that we are to try and maintain, both as a society and as individuals. But when it comes down to it, our only allegiance is to God.

If honoring your parents lines up with honoring God, that is great. But if not, you must choose Him every time.

When it comes to survivors who had abusive parents, it is an absolute certainty that this verse does not apply to them in the way that it seems to read. The commandment should be followed as much as possible, but in their case, it is not possible.

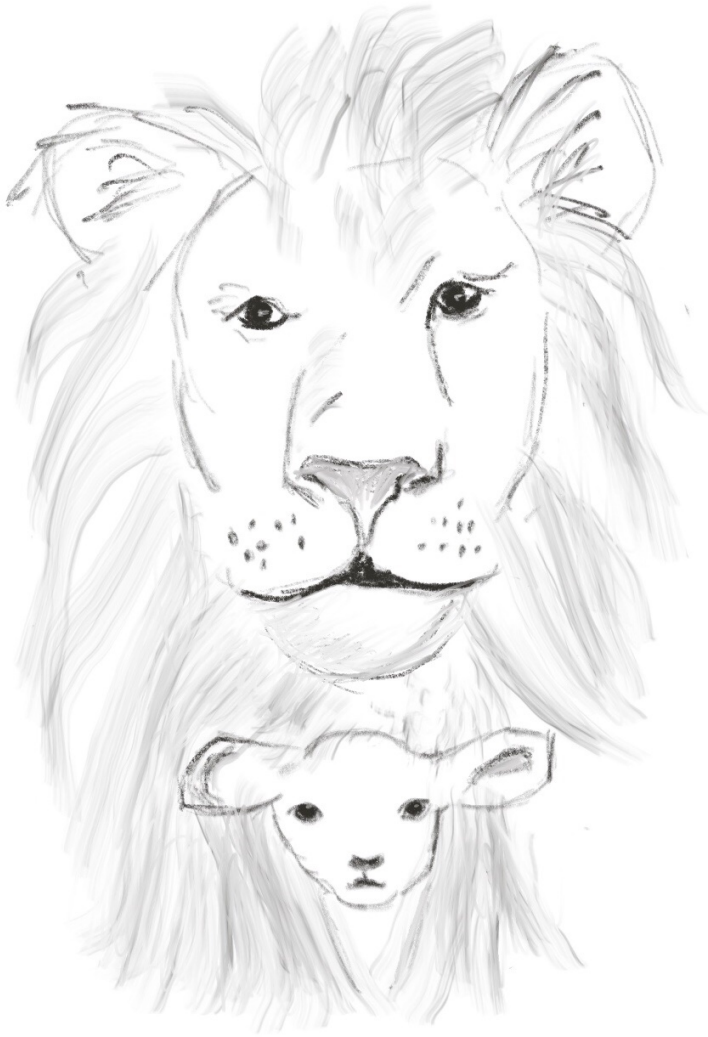
Parents who used this verse to keep survivors compliant, were misusing it for not only physical abuse, but also spiritual abuse, and they will answer for that.

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

This verse is so misused. People would toss this verse at me as if to say that God would make my life great if I just had enough faith. I would automatically think, “yeah, well, I guess I suck at faith then, because my life sucks”.

God is talking to the Israelites who are in EXILE! He is telling them that He is going to leave them there for 70 YEARS. He has plans for ISRAEL as a people and so He needs them all to settle in and prosper, have kids, and multiply so that there will be an Israel left for Him to come get. Most of the people He is talking to will not live to see those plans come about.



THE GOSPEL

[the following is a synopsis from Malcolm Smith's book, The Power of the Blood Covenant. It is here in the guide by his gracious permission]

God created human beings to have both natural (physical) life, like the animals and other creatures, AND Zoe life, life as God knows life, life in God's kingdom and not only in the physical world He created. That Zoe life, the life connected to God's life, submitted to and dependent upon God, had to be freely chosen, and so there had to be an actual choice. Thus, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was there, and the choice to obey God or not.

It was that "Zoe" life that died when Adam and Eve ate the fruit, choosing to disobey God. In declaring their independence from God, they disconnected from the source of Zoe life and became only physically alive, but spiritually dead.

"This is the world of the walking dead who do not live, but exist" - Malcolm Smith

We were all "in Adam", just like I was "in" my great grandfather, or any of my ancestors. If any of them had died before having children, I would have died in them. So Adam carried us into death with him, and we are all born spiritually dead, unaware and disconnected from the Zoe life of God. And then we also choose to sin - choose self over God.

God is Hesed, which is loving kindness - strength, steadfastness, love. God loves us because He is love, not because we are loveable.

He loved us before we were born, so there is no way that it has anything to do with our earning it.

The Bible is the story of how God fixed all of this - reconciled the human race to Himself by Jesus Christ, the new covenant. A covenant is NOT a contract, it is a commitment of love. When a covenant was made between groups, a representative was chosen.

In the story of David and Goliath, David was the representative of Israel and Goliath represented the Philistines. All of Israel was “in” David, and all the Philistines were “in” Goliath. What happened to either of them that day would happen to the entire nation they represented, even the people not born yet. Their way of life was being decided. So when a covenant was entered into between groups, everyone in each group was “in” their representative.

In the Old Testament, a covenant was made between two parties by killing an animal and splitting it in two. Then both parties would walk between the halves through the blood, basically saying, “if I break this covenant, may this be done to me”. They would cut their own arms and swear an oath to God they would keep the covenant. Then, they would share a meal together which declared the covenant to be in effect from that time forward. A covenant was much more than an agreement.

“To become part of a covenant was to enter into a new situation, becoming part of a relationship that is best understood as a family - not based on birth ties, but on a commitment of love freely given and bound with a sacred oath. The oath created a new kind of family bound together with an unbeatable life-and-death relationship” - Malcolm Smith

In order to make the covenant between God and humankind, and restore the Zoe life to us, there had to be a representative of man who was without sin - capable of holding up the man's side of the covenant. The Gospel is the Good News that God, the Father has provided that representative by sending God, the Son.

*“Jesus, the Son of God, is the covenant in Himself. The representative of God and representative of the human race meet in this one person, Jesus Christ. **The first and most basic thing we have to understand is that the new covenant is not made with us as individuals.** It is a covenant made by God the Father with God the Son. The Father guarantees the divine side of the covenant, and the Son guarantees the human side having taken our humanity as us and for us. It becomes ours individually as we believe on the Lord Jesus and are joined to Him. The new covenant is out of our hands and beyond our ability to break; it is guaranteed by the Triune God and, therefore, is unconditional and unbreakable.” - Malcolm Smith*

When we accept Christ, we accept Him as our representative in the new covenant, and we become no longer “in” Adam, but “in” Christ, and His history (righteousness) becomes ours.

“In Him, the Lord Jesus, we have the Man who is of infinite worth to God and man; for He is God the Son, infinitely beloved of the Father. Such a Man who is God can take the place of and represent every man and woman born of Adam. He can embrace us all in His history and live and die and rise again as us, making His history ours.” - Malcolm Smith

RESOURCES

Books

The Message by Eugene Peterson

The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning

Abba's Child by Brennan Manning

The Good and Beautiful God by James Bryan Smith

The Good and Beautiful Life by James Bryan Smith

The Good and Beautiful Community by James Bryan Smith

The Pressure's Off by Larry Crabb

The Great Omission by Dallas Willard

Suffering and the Heart of God by Diane Langberg

Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction by Eugene Peterson

Surprised by Hope by N. T. Wright

Walking with God through Pain and Suffering by Tim Keller
(An absolute, must-read for coming to terms with suffering, yet [forgive me, Tim] start at Part 2 because Part 1 is background, history, and kind of boring and I'm afraid people will stop reading. I promise Parts 2 & 3 are the best!)

YouTube Videos

Any with Louie Giglio

Any with Dallas Willard and/or Jon Ortberg

Any with Harmony Dust

Faith-based Websites

Rebecca Bender Initiative - Elevate Academy
www.rebeccabender.org

Treasures, Inc.
Iamatreasure.com

Shared Hope International
Sharedhope.org

Exodus Cry
Exoduscry.com

The Survivor's Guide to Surviving the Bible
www.survivingthebible.com

Podcasts on iTunes

Living Hope Fellowship (Josh Causey) on iTunes

Exodus Cry (Benjamin Nolot) on iTunes

Timothy Keller Sermons on iTunes

National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline
(888)373-7888



***“be transformed by the
renewal of your mind”
— Romans 12:2***

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