

GENESIS ROAD PRESENTS...



a look at the picture of God  
in every chapter of  
the 58th book of the Bible

# Chapter 1

## GOD SPEAKS.

There is a small theological debate raging in Christianity these days regarding the compatibility of the Old and New Testaments. Are they really harmonious? Or do they present two different pictures of two different “gods”? In other words, can the account of Jesus’ life be harmonized with the account of God’s actions in the Old Testament?

Or does Jesus’ revelation about God render the Old Testament obsolete?

I hear this verse from Hebrews 1 quoted a lot in this debate: “In the past *God spoke* to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days *he has spoken* to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (vs 1-3) Many use these texts to imply that the message of the Son contradicts (but supersedes) the message of the prophets.

But is that the case? Did Jesus believe that? Consider these things He said:

- Do not think that I have come to do away with or undo the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to do away with or undo but to *complete and fulfill* them. (Matt 5:17)
- If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because *Moses wrote about me*. But if you don’t

believe what Moses wrote, how can you believe what I say? (Jn 5:46-47)

- Then starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. (Lk 24:27)

It appears that Jesus had no trouble believing that His own life was in perfect harmony with the account of God as given through the prophets in the Old Testament. He saw no discrepancies, nothing in the record to invalidate or “set straight.” On the contrary, He *specifically* said that He had *not* come to do that, claiming instead that our belief in what *He* said about God is predicated on our belief in what *Moses* said about God.

Perhaps part of our hangup with this is demonstrated by the heading that many Bible versions give to this passage of Scripture in Hebrews 1: *God’s Final Word—His Son*. What that implies is that everything Jesus said is somehow better or more important or more correct than what the prophets said.

But was the account of Jesus in the Gospels really “the final word” from God? Does this mean that God has stopped speaking? Of course not! If that were the case, Jesus wouldn’t have said, “*I have many more things to say* to you, but they are too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, *he will lead you into all truth*. He will not speak his

own words, but he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is to come. The Spirit of truth will bring glory to me, because *he will take what I have to say and tell it to you.*" (Jn 16:12-14)

If this is true, God has *never* stopped speaking. He is *still* speaking. Thus, Hebrews 1 could read, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, *and now he speaks to us through his Spirit.*"

And, because of Jesus' own testimony, we know that all this speaking doesn't contradict itself. Sure, there may be times when it might appear that things don't fit together. That isn't unlike looking at an undone puzzle, with all its pieces scattered all over the table. At first, it may not look like all the pieces go together, but when it is complete, you can see how essential every piece is.

God is still speaking today. Nothing He said through Jesus nullified what He said through the prophets, and nothing He now says through the Spirit nullifies what He said through Jesus. Rather, He is in the process of showing us how all the pieces fit together so that, one day, we can see the grand and beautiful picture that is our God.

I can't wait to see it all.

## Chapter 2

### GOD HAS BEEN THERE, DONE THAT.

Several months ago, I went to the viewing of a friend's father who had passed away. As I approached the casket, gave her a tight hug, and expressed my sorrow, she said, "Well, you know what it feels like." I assumed she was referring to the fact that my own excellent father passed away more than four years ago now.

I just smiled and then listened as she talked about her dad. Afterward, I kept thinking about what she said. It struck me, because I make it a point *not* to say things like "I know how you feel" when I encounter somebody who is enduring a difficult situation—even if it's a situation similar to one I've been in before. Because even though we have both gone through the experience of losing our fathers, the truth is, I still *don't* know how *she* feels.

That's why I prefer to listen.

However, the fact that I had been through the same situation before gave us a certain dynamic in our interaction that she might not have had with others. If I had wanted to, I *could* have said, "I know how you feel," and she would have accepted that from me more easily than if somebody whose father was still alive had said the same thing.

Some time ago, some missionary friends of mine who work in Africa lost their six-month-old son to malaria. I certainly don't know what *that* feels like, but I remember thinking at the time that this awful experience was sure to open up new pathways of understanding and relating to the African people

they work with—for there surely aren't too many families in Africa that *haven't* known the loss of a child. I could only hope and pray that traveling through that same dark experience would give my friends new opportunities to minister to those around them, for now, they would be perceived as "getting it."

The whole village now knows that when it comes to losing a child, they have been there, done that.

So, what does this have to do with Hebrews 2? Paul makes an interesting observation about Jesus: "God is the One who made all things, and all things are for his glory. He wanted to have many children share his glory, *so he made the One who leads people to salvation perfect through suffering*. . . And now he can help those who are tempted, *because he himself suffered and was tempted*." (vs 10, 18)

Often, it seems these verses are interpreted to mean that Jesus was somehow imperfect before He suffered as a human or that His suffering allowed God to "really understand" what was going on down here. I have even heard it suggested that before Jesus came, God didn't know what suffering was because He doesn't suffer. (You don't have to read very far in the Bible to know that's not the case.)

But the Greek word rendered *perfect* in that passage doesn't imply that Jesus was morally deficient before He "gained" something through His suffering. Rather, it means to complete, to accomplish, and

also *to qualify one for a position they are to hold*. I guess that's where the second idea has crept in—that Jesus had to somehow gain experience in suffering so He could plead with God for us.

I mean, really? Can you see Jesus up in heaven saying, “Really, Dad, you have no idea what it’s like down there!”

No, no, no.

Don't we know by now that *nothing* God does is for *His* benefit, but for *ours*? If Jesus needed to “be qualified” for a position He was going to hold, He needed to be qualified *in our minds*, not God's! *We* were the ones who were skeptical that God could understand our plight. *We* were the ones who scoffed at the idea that God could know how we feel.

If God tried to whisper in our ear, “I know how you feel. I know what you're going through,” *we* are the ones who would have been quick to dismiss His attempts to comfort us—just as surely as we would dismiss a person who says “I know how it feels to lose a child” when they have *never* lost a child. *We* would never have believed that He could know the depth of our suffering if He hadn't come here in person.

The role of Jesus as Savior has been perfected through His suffering because, as a result of His identifying with us, *we* are now more apt to receive *Him*. It's not the other way around. It's not that *God* is more apt to receive *us* now that Jesus has suffered. It's that we are open to God being with us in our deepest pain that we wouldn't have been previously *because He Himself suffered*.

Because of what Jesus did, we can know that no matter what we are going through, God has been

there, done that. We have a constant Someone in our lives who knows, understands, listens, empathizes, *and* is able to lift our heads and point us forward to the joy set before us.

# Chapter 3

## GOD HAS A MEDIA DEPARTMENT .

Paul begins this chapter by applying a term to Jesus that you don't hear very often: "Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our *apostle* and high priest." (vs 1)

When was the last time you heard Jesus referred to as an apostle? I'm not sure I ever have. Rather, we think of Him as the one who selected, trained, and commissioned the apostles.

But the fact that Paul uses this term to describe Jesus reveals something about God. First, it's important to understand what the word means. In the Greek, *apostolos* doesn't just mean one of the twelve disciples. It simply means delegate, messenger, ambassador.

Understanding that, it makes perfect sense to call Jesus an apostle. He is Heaven's Apostle, and He was in that role long before He was born to a teenage girl in Bethlehem. Long ago, before our planet was even created, He was a divine messenger to the angels in the form of Michael the Archangel.

There is dispute about this idea among Christians, but for me, one of the main evidences of this is found in Revelation's description of the universal war between God and Satan: "Then war broke out in heaven. *Michael and his angels* fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. *The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads*

the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." (Rev 12:7-9)

Why would perfect angels need a heavenly ambassador? Because being sinless doesn't mean you automatically know everything, and one of the great limitations of *created* beings is their inherent limitations in understanding their *Creator*. Of course, the entrance of sin would only exacerbate that problem, but it is reasonable to conclude that any perfect *finite* being would have trouble fully understanding an *infinite* being.

We have no problem understanding that Jesus came here as a *man* to introduce the Father to us. Why should we have such a hard time believing that He would appear as an *angel* to introduce the Father to them?

Because God is fully invested in having personal relationships with His creatures, He is always on the offensive when it comes to initiating and maintaining that relationship. Thus, God has a media department. He always has, and He always will.

*Jesus* is this media department. His divine role is to be the heavenly apostle, bringing messages about God straight to the people. You see, with God, there is no middle man. He does all His own PR.

## Chapter 4

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### GOD HAS ISSUED AN OPEN INVITATION.

There is a most startling statement at the end of this chapter that, I believe, has lost its punch through the years—especially since most of us no longer live in a country ruled by a king: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (vs 16)

I imagine that this must have sounded totally *outrageous* to those who first read and heard Paul’s letter to the Hebrews. After all, who in their right mind approaches the king’s throne, let alone does so *boldly*?

If you think back to the story of Esther, she was very nervous to approach the king’s throne, *and she was the queen!* Still, there was always the danger that if she approached the throne and her husband didn’t extend the scepter to her, she would lose her life.

The fact is, ancient monarchs only allowed their closest and most trusted advisers to get near the throne. Often, even *family* members couldn’t be trusted to be in such close proximity to the king because it wasn’t uncommon for a relative to murder the monarch in an effort to take over the kingdom.

It would have been *unheard of* for a king to issue an open invitation to approach his throne.

Yet that’s what the King of the Universe does. And not only is there an open invitation to approach

Him, but the encouragement to do it *boldly* and the assurance that we will find *grace* there when we do.

And one of the cool things about that grace is that the Greek phrase translated “in time of need” is actually a colloquialism which means “in the nick of time.” So, not only may we come to God boldly and be assured of finding grace, but it will also be grace just *when* and *where* I need it most.

Grace in the nick of time. It can never run out, and it can never fail. We can and will find it whenever we approach the King’s throne. All we need to do is take Him up on His invitation.

# Chapter 5

## GOD ENCOURAGES MATURITY.

Recently, I was horrified to discover that there are apparently many people in our society who choose to live as “adult babies.” These are grown adults who, for at least part of their day, sleep in a crib, suck on a pacifier, drink from a bottle, wear diapers (and, yes, go to the bathroom in them), and eat in a high chair.

I’m not sure which is more strange—the people who choose to live this way or those who choose to live with them and “care” for them.

But as odd as this may seem in the course of physical life, it apparently also has its equivalent in the course of spiritual life: “I have a lot more to say about this, but it may be hard for you to follow since you’ve become dull in your understanding. By this time, you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet I feel like you want me to re-teach you the most basic things that God wants you to know. It’s almost like *you’re a baby again*, coddled at your mother’s breast, nursing, not ready for solid food.” (vs 11-12)

Notice the way Paul talked about them being babies: It’s almost like you’re a baby *again*. He’s not talking to people who are truly “babes in the faith.” These aren’t newborn converts. No, these are people who have been through the “infancy” stage of faith and are either choosing to remain in it or are regressing back to it.

There is a *big* difference, for there is nothing more delightful than a newborn baby, but who wants to

be around a 20-year-old who *chooses to* whine, cry, talk gibberish, spit up, crawl, and soil himself? There is *nothing* delightful about *that*. Unfortunately, though, many Christians have decided to firmly plant themselves in the spiritual infancy stage.

- Many are cranky and easily irritable, insisting on their own way.
- Many spend a lot of time spiritually asleep.
- Many make big messes that they won’t clean up.
- Many insist on “being fed” by others instead of feeding themselves.
- Many have not learned meaningful ways of communicating.
- Many are focused only on their own needs and wants.

It is sad and frustrating to encounter these behaviors so frequently in the church—*especially* in those who are in positions of leadership! For there is no house so chaotic as the one where those who are tasked with the responsibility of parenting are just as immature as the children.

God doesn’t want us to remain babies forever. His ideal is that we mature and develop in our faith, in much the same way that our own children mature and develop in every area of their lives. There is so much that He wants us to know, discover, and experience, but it will never happen if we refuse to leave the crib.

# Chapter 6

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## GOD WANTS TO TELL YOU MORE.

As a student of Scripture, one of the most provocative and tantalizing statements of Jesus was His declaration to the disciples: “I have many more things to say to you, but they are too much for you now.” (Jn 16:12) *What were those things?* If just one of the disciples had been interested in knowing more, what would Jesus have said?

Fortunately, we know that this wasn’t a one-time chance. As the disciples were able, I’m sure God was ever opening their minds to more and more understanding. But, given what Paul said in this chapter of Hebrews, it seems like the God’s desire to want to tell us more (and our apparent inability or reluctance to grow in our understanding) is a common problem:

“So come on, let’s leave the preschool fingerpainting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ. The basic foundational truths are in place: turning your back on ‘salvation by self-help’ and turning in trust toward God; baptismal instructions; laying on of hands; resurrection of the dead; eternal judgment. God helping us, we’ll stay true to all that. *But there’s so much more. Let’s get on with it!*” (vs 1-3)

One of the wonderful things about God is that He won’t force us to go any faster than we are able or willing. He will wait patiently until we are ready to move along in our understanding, but we shouldn’t misunderstand His patience as evidence that we have somehow “arrived” in our thinking.

There will *always* be more to learn about God—even throughout eternity! And just because He won’t take us any faster than we are willing to go, that doesn’t mean that He doesn’t want to tell us more. Just like a parent who is eager to share the world with their developing child, God has so many wonders to open to our minds.

So, come on, let’s move on from the basics of faith we’ve been studying for so long. There is a whole universe out there to become acquainted with, not to mention an awesome God whose character is a universe of exploration in itself!

I guarantee you, no matter how much you understand right now, God wants to tell you more.

Are you ready?

## Chapter 7

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### GOD HAS ALL THE PEACE.

What a fascinating chapter about the priesthood! With all the parallels drawn between Jesus and Melchizedek (no beginning, no end, in the form of the Son of God, one who lives forever), I'm thinking that the appearance of Melchizedek to Abraham was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus right there in the Old Testament.

But whether that's true or not, there is certainly something we can learn about God from Melchizedek's name and title: "This Melchizedek was *king of Salem* [another name for Jerusalem] and priest of God Most High. . . First, the name Melchizedek means '*king of righteousness*'; then also, 'king of Salem' means '*king of peace*.'" (vs 1-2)

Paul put Melchizedek's name and title in a certain order, which I think is subtle, but also very significant. First, Melchizedek is righteous; his *very name* means "king of righteousness." *Then* he is referred to as the "king of peace." I don't think this is accidental, for righteousness *always* comes before peace. And by *peace*, I mean the kind of abiding peace, security, and confidence that transcend circumstances—not simply the absence of conflict.

*That* kind of peace—the peace that passes all understanding—can *only* come from righteousness. Many of us try to find shortcuts to peace. We look for it in *evasion*, *escape*, or in *compromise*, but it only truly comes as a by-product of righteousness. Anything else that masquerades as peace will be short-lived.

And whether Melchizedek was a human being or a heavenly messenger, he was certainly a representative of the Kingdom of God. For if one wants to live in a city of peace, its king must be righteous—and that is surely a fitting and accurate description of our God.

Because He is forever righteous, He has all the peace.

## Chapter 8

### GOD ALWAYS SERVES.

After giving a lot of explanation about the implications of being our high priest, Paul gets right down to the point at the beginning of this chapter: “What I mean is that we have a high priest who sits on the right side of God’s throne in heaven. Our high priest serves in the Most Holy Place, *the true place of worship that was made by God, not by humans.*” (vs 1-2)

There is a fair amount of debate over the meaning of the “true place of worship,” or as other translations put it, the “true tabernacle.” Some people say there is an actual building somewhere in the heavens that the Israelite sanctuary was but a copy of. Other say the heavenly sanctuary doesn’t necessarily connote a building, but simply a place where God is worshiped (such as the worship service depicted in Revelation 4).

But I think to spend time debating over whether there is a building or not misses the entire point of Paul’s statement in Hebrews 8. Building or not, Jesus serves in that place as high priest. And what that *really* means is that the very person who is the *object* of worship is the one *servicing* in worship.

It is continually difficult for us to wrap our minds around the fact that, at heart, God is a servant. We so associate power with control and authority that it still seems surprising to find the Almighty God of the Universe in the role of a servant—even in the very place and time when He receives worship from His creatures.

Because of the kind of person God is, there are no one-way streets in the universe. Even the experience of worship doesn’t simply flow from *us* to *Him*. For at the very moment He is receiving our worship, He is engaged in the task of ministering to our hearts and needs. Thus, worship is a *cycle*, not a *straight line*.

No matter what He’s doing, God *always* serves. If He can find a way to serve even in the midst of worship, there can be no doubt that service is a part of *all* He does, *all* the time.

# Chapter 9

## GOD: THE ORIGINAL MR. CLEAN.

Remission. If you're like me, when you hear that word, you immediately think of cancer. And when you've got cancer, *remission* is good news. No, it's *great* news! It means that the disease which had been threatening your life is now gone—hopefully never to come back.

Sin is also a disease. And, like cancer, it is a disease that can go into remission for good. In fact, Paul addresses how that works in this chapter of Hebrews: “Moses also sprinkled with blood the tent itself and all the sacred vessels. And you will find that in the Law almost all cleansing is made by means of blood—as the common saying has it: *No shedding of blood, no remission of sin.*” (vs 21-22) In other words, the shedding of blood was necessary to send our sin into remission.

But not so fast.

Not just *any* blood could accomplish the task: “For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer *are not able to cleanse the consciences* of the people who bring them.” (vs 9) And Paul goes on to say that only the blood of *Christ* can cleanse the conscience and send sin into remission.

We often think of blood as something that makes a mess, so we seldom think of it as being a cleansing agent. But I recently read this fascinating description of the cleansing power of blood by famous hand surgeon Henry Brand:

*“All that we have learned about physiology in recent years confirms the accuracy of the still-jarring juxtaposition of blood and cleansing. I suggest a simple experiment if you truly wish to grasp the function of blood as a cleansing agent. Find a blood pressure kit and wrap the cuff around your upper arm. When it is in position, have a friend pump it up to about 200 mm. of mercury, a sufficient pressure to stop the flow of blood in your arm. Initially your arm will feel an uncomfortable tightness beneath the cuff.*

*“Now comes the revealing part of the experiment: perform any easy task with your cuffed arm. Merely flex your finger and make a fist about ten times in succession, or cut paper with scissors, or drive a nail into wood with a hammer. The first few movements will seem quite normal as the muscles obediently contract and relax. Then you will feel a slight weakness. Almost without warning a hot flash of pain will strike, after maybe ten movements. Your muscles will cramp. If you force yourself to continue this simple task, you will likely cry out in absolute agony. Finally, you cannot force yourself to continue; the pain overwhelms you. When your release the tourniquet and air escapes from the cuff, blood will rush into your aching arm and a wonderful sense of relief will soothe your muscles.*

*“Physiologically, you have just experienced the cleansing of the blood. While the blood supply to your arm was shut off, you forced your muscles to keep working. As they converted oxygen into energy, they produced certain waste products (metabolites) that are normally flushed away instantly in the bloodstream. Due to the constricted blood flow, however, these metabolites accumulated in your cells. They were not ‘cleansed’ by the swirling stream of blood, and therefore in a few minutes you felt the agony of retained toxins.”*

“The agony of retained toxins” is such an appropriate way to describe what happens in the sinful mind as well! For we are all born into sin, all born into a condition where we have a natural distrust for God (based on Satan’s lies) and a propensity to self-sufficiency. And the longer we buy into these lies, the more agony we experience.

That’s why, in the spiritual world, only the blood of Christ can cleanse the conscience from these “toxins,” because the way in which Christ’s blood was shed exposes the lies and reveals the truth about the kind of person God is.

And when we come to understand and embrace the kind of person God is, we are able to put our trust in Him. And trusting Him is what sends our sin into remission.

God is the original Mr. Clean. All the blood of all the bulls, goats, and sheep sacrificed in the Old Testament, and all the modern sacrifices, bargains, and negotiations we try to make with God *do not* have the power to cleanse our souls.

Only *one* thing can do that.

Only the truth about the kind of person God is—as revealed in the way that our Lord Jesus Christ shed His precious blood—can do that.

# Chapter 10

## GOD WORKS FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

In this chapter of Hebrews, Paul continues to draw distinctions between the Old and New Covenants, and one of the things that particularly caught my eye was the quote he chose from Jeremiah: “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. *I will put my laws in their hearts*, and I will write them on their minds.” (Jer 31:33)

This declaration from God promises that the New Covenant will work from the *inside out*, as opposed to the Old Covenant, which was designed to work from the *outside in*. And while it might not seem like it at first blush, there is a *huge* difference between the two.

I was recently having a conversation with a friend who insisted that if people who profess to believe in God commit sinful acts, then they don't *really* believe. That might seem like a logical conclusion when working from an *outside in* model, but it's not necessarily true when one is dealing with an *inside out* model.

Why does God prefer to work from the *inside out*? Because our problem is on the *inside*. At heart, sin is an attitude problem that causes relational separation, and this must be fixed if our relationship with God is to be restored. The problem with the *outside in* approach can be perfectly seen in the lives of the Pharisees. They had so devoted themselves to keeping the law that they were “perfect” on the outside, but totally rotten to the core.

By comparison, when you work from the *inside out*, you may end up with friends of God who continue to make poor decisions while the changes from the inside are reaching the outside. However, the good news is, there is no danger of looking good on the outside while you're rotten to the core. Once the outside has been “fixed,” it matches what's already on the inside.

So, if God prefers to work from the *inside out*, why did He begin with a covenant that was based on the *outside in*? It's simple. There was nothing wrong or bad about starting from the *outside in*; it was simply the approach that was necessary at the time.

The evidence that Jesus presented about God's character through His life and death was necessary to effect changes from the *inside out*, and it wasn't yet the right time for Jesus to come. Until then, God tried to limit as much sin damage as possible by working from the *outside in* and restricting evil behavior.

I so glad God will use whatever means necessary to reach us and heal us. And I'm *really* glad He cares more about what's on the *inside* than what's on the *outside*. Even though I am far from perfect in my behavior, I know that when He looks at me, He sees my heart—and I trust Him to fix all the rest.

## Chapter 11

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### GOD DOES NOT OWN COOKIE CUTTERS.

Every time I read this chapter, I am blown away again at the laundry list of faith heroes from the Bible. I am also blown away at God's total graciousness in branding as "faith heroes" people like Samson and Jephthah and Gideon—people who were certainly *far* from "perfect." Of course, if perfection were a requirement for faith, then I suppose *nobody* would have made the list.

The other thing that really gets me every time I read this chapter is the *myriad* of different outcomes to faith. Did you notice that?

- Abel had faith, and he *died*.
- Enoch had faith, and he *lived*.
- Noah had faith, and he *stayed*.
- Abraham had faith, and he *went*.
- Moses had faith, and he *was loyal* to his people.
- Rahab had faith, and she *aided the enemy*.

Paul goes on to say that, all through faith, some lived and some died, some conquered kingdoms and some were tortured, some were weak and some were strong, some administered justice and some wandered aimlessly about. Truly, the *only* common denominator in all of these stories is the declaration that all of these people were living by faith.

I think it's sometimes difficult for us to embrace the concept that faith could lead to radically different outcomes. We measure *everything* by outcomes, so naturally, if both I and my neighbor are living "by faith," I expect things for the two of us to turn

out relatively the same. Maybe that's why it's so tempting for us to judge whether another person is living by faith—we're looking at outcomes.

But God doesn't own cookie cutters, and if Hebrews 11 should tell us anything, it's that faith is as unique in the life of each person as each person himself is unique. We can't judge faith by outcomes. In fact, apparently, we can't judge faith at all! God alone knows the heart, so He alone knows who trusts Him and who doesn't.

And for those who do, get ready.

Living by faith is nothing short of a wild ride!

## Chapter 12

### GOD WILL DO IT ALL.

I grew up playing sports, and whether it was basketball, football, or volleyball, invariably there were certain people on the team who could be referred to as *ball bogs*. These were people who apparently thought they could do it all themselves. Sometimes they could . . . and sometimes they couldn't. Either way, "team" wasn't uppermost on their minds.

I had to chuckle to myself as I started reading this familiar chapter of Hebrews and realized, at the outset, that God is described here as a *faith bog*: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the *the originator and perfecter of our faith*." (vs 1-2)

After having just written a chapter on faith, Paul is apparently interested in detailing who is responsible for its inception and its maturation—and it's *not* us. Is that somehow disappointing? To think that God doesn't need us to actively do anything in the development of our faith? Would we prefer Him to be a little more "team"-minded in this regard?

Perhaps, but the truth is, we don't have to do a thing when it comes to the development of our faith or the maturing of our relationship with God. He will do it all. The only thing we must do is determine to stay out of His way.

That may not sound like much, but in fact, staying out of His way is a *huge* job—and one that most of us are only marginally comfortable with. You see, it is in the sinful nature to want to *control*. This includes trying to have a say in how sees fit to work in our lives. We may run the gamut from outright rejecting His work to trying to "help" Him do it, but all of that runs contrary to *trust*—which, simply put, is faith.

We don't need to help God initiate our faith. He does it all by Himself. And we don't need to help Him perfect our faith, either. As long as we allow Him to work freely in our life, trusting that He knows what's best for us, He will accomplish the perfection of our faith in His own way and in His own time.

As strange as it may sound, we really can sit back and take it easy.

Unless we stop Him, God will do it all.

## Chapter 13

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### GOD IS THE ANTIDOTE TO GREED.

In this concluding chapter of Hebrews, Paul married two things that might not immediately seem to go together—greed and the promise of God’s presence: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” (vs 5)

What do those two things have to do with each other? Perhaps there is a hint in the Greek. Apparently, the Greek word translated *content* was originally used to describe a nation that had all it needed to sustain the life of the people within its boundaries—without having to import anything.

Thus, for Paul’s readers, the exhortation is to be content with what they have *because* they realize that they truly have everything they need. And what constitutes the “everything they need” part? Why it’s God Himself, who promises that they will never want for His presence.

Actually, that’s another interesting part of the Greek in this verse. Although I am not personally well-versed enough in Greek to pick up on this subtlety, many commentators point out that, in this part of the verse, Paul uses *five* negatives, which would make it read this way in English: “...because God has said, ‘I will never, never, never, never, never leave you.’”

In our possessions-obsessed, money-driven world, it is surely difficult to grasp the reality that *all* we need and *all* that is truly important is ultimately

*only* found in God. If we were all alone on the planet and we had God, we would have everything we needed. If we owned everything on the planet and we *didn’t* have God, we *wouldn’t* have anything we needed.

This is such a valuable truth for anyone struggling to find satisfaction and contentment in life. Don’t get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with money or possessions, but it is certainly easy to get caught in the trap of wanting more and more and more. Instead, we can remember that God is always with us and choose to be content with what He has given us at this moment in life.

And because He promises never, never, never, never, never to leave us, we may have confidence that there will *always* be a constant in our lives. Things may come and go. People may come and go. Money may come and go. But God will *always* be there.

And as long as He is here, we truly do have *everything* we need. He is the antidote to greed.