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Introduction — A Breakfast Conversation That Became a Series

This book didn't start in a library.

It started over coffee.

Two friends, a Bible on the table between us,
talking about why so many parts of the Christian faith feel disconnected —
like puzzle pieces from different boxes.

We weren't arguing.

We weren't trying to "fix" Christianity.

We were asking:

What if the pieces actually do fit?

What if there's a way to see the whole picture
that makes sense not just in the mind, but in the heart?

Somewhere between the eggs and the second cup of coffee,
the "garden to garden" idea came up.

The thought that the Bible's story is one seamless arc —
beginning in Eden and ending in the New Jerusalem.

God plants man in the first garden.

Man chooses separation.

The rest of Scripture is the account of God's relentless mission
to bring us home to the second garden —
a perfect, eternal home where nothing broken remains.

Why This Matters

Most of us first hear the gospel in fragments:
a verse here, a sermon there,
an altar call that feels urgent but not fully explained.

The pieces are true,
but without the frame of the whole story,

salvation can sound like a ticket to somewhere vague,
earned by a system we barely understand.

When we see it as the restoration of what was lost,
everything changes.

Sin isn't just "bad behavior" —
it's the barrier that keeps us from God's presence.
Jesus isn't just a teacher —
He's the bridge back to the life we were created for.
The Holy Spirit isn't a "bonus" —
He's God's life in us now,
sustaining us until we see Him face to face.

When This Story Became Clear

We realized this framework isn't new.
Church fathers hinted at it.
Theologians like C.S. Lewis and N.T. Wright have echoed it.
Missionaries have lived it.
It's been there all along —
we just needed to name it.

This isn't our idea.
It's God's story.
We're just walking through it,
section by section,
like a couple of friends still sitting at that breakfast table.

How to Read This Book

Think of it as an invitation.
Not to agree with every conclusion,
but to explore the questions with an open Bible.
Not to adopt someone else's faith,
but to strengthen your own.

Each chapter builds on the one before,
but every chapter can stand alone.
We'll look at salvation, the Holy Spirit, baptism,
faith and works, generosity,
and the tensions that have divided Christians for centuries —
all in light of the garden-to-garden story.

By the last page,
I hope you'll see the Christian life not as a waiting room,
but as a field already planted with seeds that will bloom in eternity.

The coffee's hot.
Let's begin.

Chapter 1 – Why Salvation Is Needed

(From Garden to Garden)

The Bible starts in a garden.

God planted it Himself.

Perfect.

Complete.

Lacking nothing.

“And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed.” (Genesis 2:8)

Adam was placed there.

Not as a servant.

As a son (*Luke 3:38*).

He had work to do.

A home to tend.

God to walk with.

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15)

It was more than a place.

It was life in God’s presence.

No barrier.

No fear.

The First Boundary

There was one boundary.

One tree.

One command.

“You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

Love requires choice.

Obedience is only real when disobedience is possible.

They chose to eat.

The Break

It wasn't just a broken rule.

It was a broken relationship.

Sin entered.

Death followed.

“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all.” (Romans 5:12)

God's holiness cannot live with sin.

“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; You cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”
(Habakkuk 1:13)

Adam and Eve hid.

Then they were sent out.

“He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword... to guard the way to the tree of life.”
(Genesis 3:24)

The way back was closed.

We have lived outside the garden ever since.

The Long Middle

God didn't give up.

From the moment of the fall, He began to promise restoration.

Even in His judgment on the serpent, He spoke of One who would come.

“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

Through the centuries, He left signs.

Sacrifices — life for life, blood for atonement.

“It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” (Leviticus 17:11)

The Law — His perfect standard, showing right from wrong.

And showing that we could not keep it.

“Through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)

The Prophets — speaking of a Servant who would bear the guilt of many.

“He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities... and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5–6)

These were not random rituals or rules.

They were shadows.

Signs pointing forward.

The Last Adam

Then came what Paul calls “the last Adam.”

“The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Corinthians 15:45)

But this is no “second try” at humanity.

Jesus was not a new man in a long line of men.

He is God.

Eternal.

Co-equal with the Father and the Spirit.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1,14)

The Creator stepped into His creation.

The Son took on our humanity.

Fully God.

Fully man.

He lived the perfect obedience Adam failed to live.

He showed the perfect fellowship Adam lost.

The Cross

Then He took our place.

“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

On the cross, He bore our separation.

He cried, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Matthew 27:46)
— the cost of carrying our sin.

When He said, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30), the barrier that stood since Eden was broken.

His resurrection proved the victory was complete.

Sin and death were defeated.

The Final Garden

The Bible ends where it began — in a garden.

John writes:

“The river of the water of life...flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... On either side of the river, the tree of life...No longer will there be anything accursed... They will see His face... and they will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:1–5)

No curse.

No darkness.

No separation.

Life as it was meant to be.

Forever.

From Garden to Garden

The first garden was lost through disobedience.

The final garden is ours through Christ's obedience.

Salvation is not arbitrary.

It is the only way God could be just — sin truly dealt with — and merciful — sinners welcomed home.

We live between the gardens now.

The gates are open.

The question is not only, “Do you believe?”

It is, “Do you want to walk with Him now, so that when the final garden comes, you are already home?”

Chapter 2 – The Short Gospel and the Whole Story

Most of us first heard the Gospel in a few simple sentences.

“You are a sinner. Jesus died for your sins. If you believe in Him, you will be saved.”

That’s true.

Every word of it.

And God has used that message to save countless people.

But sometimes, when that’s all we’ve heard, it leaves questions hanging in the air.

Why is sin such a big deal?

Why a cross?

Why blood?

Why is Jesus the only way?

Why Some Struggle to Explain

Many believers love Jesus deeply but freeze when asked to explain *why* they believe.

They may remember verses like “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31), but struggle to answer follow-up questions:

- “Why did God have to kill His Son?”
- “Couldn’t He just forgive?”
- “What about good people who never heard of Jesus?”

Faith is essential.

But the Bible links faith and understanding.

Proverbs says, “If you call out for insight... then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3–5).

When we see the whole story, our faith is not blind trust — it is trust built on truth we can see and share.

The Short Gospel Is the Final Act

Imagine walking into a movie for the last 15 minutes.
You might grasp the ending, but you'd miss the setup.

The short Gospel is the final act of a much larger drama.
It tells us how to respond, but not always why the story had to unfold that way.

Without the earlier acts — the creation, the fall, the long promises — the cross can feel like a strange divine transaction instead of the perfect resolution to a centuries-long rescue plan.

Seeing the Whole Story

When we step back to view the Gospel from Genesis to Revelation, everything changes:

- Sin is no longer just “breaking God’s rules” — it is the fracture of the relationship we were made for.
- The cross is not an arbitrary method — it is the only way for God to remain just and yet forgive sinners (Romans 3:26).
- Heaven is not just a reward — it is the restoration of the home we lost and the fellowship we were designed for.

Peter preached this way in Acts 3.

He started with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — the Creator and covenant-maker — before pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of all God’s promises.

Why This Strengthens Us

Knowing the whole story does three things:

1. It deepens personal faith.

When you see the plan from garden to garden, you realize the cross is not random — it is the only way the door could be opened.

2. It equips us to share with clarity.

We can walk someone through the story like a map, showing them where we started, what went wrong, and how God is restoring it all.

3. It guards us from being shaken.

When hard questions come, we have more than “just believe” — we have the story God has been telling since the beginning.

Humility in the Telling

We should never treat the fuller story as if it’s a “better gospel.”

The same Gospel saves in one verse or in one hundred.

Paul said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

But he also spent hours in the synagogues “explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (Acts 17:3).

Short or long, the goal is the same:

That people meet the risen Christ and trust Him.

The Invitation

If you’ve only ever known the short version, don’t feel cheated.

Feel invited.

Invited to see the Gospel in full color.

Invited to know not just *that* you believe, but *why*.

Invited to walk in the confidence that this story is true from the first garden to the last.

When someone asks you what you believe, you can start at the end if you need to.

But now, you can also start at the beginning.

Chapter 3 – Maintaining Salvation

(Persevering in the Father's House)

Some live afraid.

“What if I slip? What if I fall out?”

Others live careless.

“I prayed once. I’m fine.”

Scripture speaks to both.

Strong comfort.

Serious warning.

Not to confuse us.

To keep us close.

A Relationship, Not a Receipt

Salvation isn’t a receipt you tuck in a drawer.

It’s a relationship you live in.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice... and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27–28).

Strong comfort.

Paul adds, “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

God keeps His own.

Jude calls Him the One “who is able to keep you from stumbling” (Jude 24).

Yet Jesus also said, “Abide in Me” (John 15:4).

“Remain.”

“Stay.”

Relationship language.

Not a one-time event.

A daily posture.

Hold both truths.
God holds you.
You hold fast to Him (Hebrews 10:23).

Why Warnings Exist

The Bible gives real warnings.
Not hypotheticals.
Not scare tactics.

“Take heed lest you fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).
“The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13).
“If we go on sinning deliberately... a fearful expectation of judgment”
(Hebrews 10:26–27).
“After escaping the world... entangled again... the last state has become worse” (2 Peter 2:20).

What do these do?
They build holy sobriety.
They pull us from the cliff’s edge.
They call us back to the Shepherd.

Warnings don’t mean the Shepherd is weak.
They mean the path is real.
And wandering is real.
So is return.

Stumbling vs. Walking Away

Every believer stumbles.
Peter did.
He denied Jesus three times.
But Jesus prayed “that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32).
Peter wept.
Peter returned.
Grace held.

John writes, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive” (1 John 1:9).

That’s stumbling.

That’s restoration.

Walking away is different.

Settled, willful refusal.

A heart that says, “I know—and I don’t want Him.”

Hebrews warns of tasting, seeing, then rejecting (Hebrews 6:4–6).

Sobering words.

How do we tell the difference?

Not by counting sins.

By watching direction.

Toward the Father?

Or away?

The Prodigal Picture

Jesus told a story for people like us (Luke 15:11–24).

A son left.

Far country.

Wasted life.

He was still a son.

But he was not at home.

Then he “came to himself.”

He turned.

He went home.

The father ran.

Robe. Ring. Feast.

Restored fellowship.

Some never come back.

That’s the ache of the story.

But the door remains open while life remains.

The Father longs to welcome.
Always.

Who Keeps Whom?

Ask it plainly.
Who keeps whom?
Answer it biblically.

God keeps.

We keep close.

God keeps:

“No one will snatch them” (John 10:28).

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:38–39).

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes... I will never cast out” (John 6:37).

We keep close:

“Abide in Me... apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5).

“Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21).

“Work out your salvation... for it is God who works in you” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Grace moves first.

Grace sustains.

Grace enables our “keeping.”

We respond.

We cooperate.

We stay near.

Means of Staying Near

God gives ordinary means for extraordinary perseverance.

The Word.

Daily bread.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word” (Matthew 4:4).
Read. Hear. Do.

Prayer.

“Watch and pray” (Matthew 26:41).
Cast cares.
Receive strength.
Keep a soft heart.

Fellowship.

“Not neglecting to meet together... but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:25).
Lone sheep invite wolves.
Stay with the flock.

Obedience.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).
Love expresses itself in action.
Action trains desire.

Confession.

Quick confession keeps short accounts (1 John 1:9).
Pride hardens.
Humility heals.

The Table.

“Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19).
We remember a real body.
Real blood.
A real covenant.

Witness.

“you will be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8).
Light burns brighter when shared.
Faith strengthens when used.

These are not hoops.
They are lifelines.
They keep us close to the One who keeps us.

Marks of a Kept Life

What does “maintaining” look like?

Abiding.

A steady “withness.”
Not flashy.
Faithful.

Fruit.

Love, joy, peace... self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).
Not overnight.
But over time.

Endurance.

Storms come.
Roots hold.
“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial” (James 1:12).

Love for the brethren.

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers” (1 John 3:14).
Family resemblance.

Repentance on repeat.

Not self-loathing.
God-ward turning.
Again and again.

None of these earn salvation.
They reveal it.
They are family traits.

What About Assurance?

God wants His children sure.

“These things I have written... that you may know that you have eternal life”
(1 John 5:13).

Know.

Not guess.

Assurance grows where Jesus dwells.

In the light.

In the Word.

In obedience.

In love.

The Spirit bears witness “with our spirit that we are children of God”
(Romans 8:16).

Not every day feels the same.

But the witness remains.

There is also honest self-check.

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Corinthians
13:5).

Not to breed fear.

To cultivate sincerity.

Assurance is a fruit of abiding.

Not a substitute for it.

The Armor for the Walk

We are not naïve.

We have an enemy.

Schemes.

Accusations.

Lies.

“Put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11).

Truth around your waist.

Righteousness guarding your heart.

Gospel shoes ready to move.

Faith like a shield.

Salvation as a helmet.

The Word as a sword.

Prayer in the Spirit—“at all times.”

Armor is for soldiers, not tourists.

You’re in a war.

But the Captain already won.

Fight near Him.

You will stand.

A Way to Live This Week

Keep it simple.

Keep it daily.

Morning:

Open the Word.

One psalm. One gospel paragraph.

Pray it back.

“Keep me near, Lord.”

Midday:

A five-minute walk.

Thank Him out loud.

Name one person to encourage today.

Evening:

Confess quickly.

Receive mercy.

Plan tomorrow’s small obedience.

Weekly:

Gather with believers.

Listen.

Worship.

Take the Table when offered.

Serve someone with no return.

Tiny hinges.

Big doors.

Holding Both Without Fear

So, can a person “lose salvation”?

The Bible gives us two rails to run on.

Rail one: God keeps His own.

No one can snatch.

No power can separate.

Christ will finish what He starts.

Rail two: Keep yourselves in His love.

Abide.

Endure.

Do not harden your heart.

Live on both rails.

Not in fear.

Not in presumption.

In trust.

Don't argue at the cliff's edge.

Walk with the Shepherd in the field.

Close enough to hear His voice.

Close enough to feel His staff.

Closing Reflection

You don't "maintain" salvation by white-knuckling religion.
You remain saved by remaining with the Savior.

Stay near.
Stay soft.
Stay honest.
Stay helped.

He holds your hand.
You hold His.
And between the two, you will make it home.

Chapter 4 – The Holy Spirit - Who He Is

(Personhood and Role of the Holy Spirit)

Some think of the Holy Spirit as a mist.

A feeling.

A flash of power.

An “it.”

The Bible calls Him **He**.

Personal.

Present.

God.

He Is God

Peter told Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:3–4).

Equal with the Father.

Equal with the Son.

Jesus named Him alongside them:

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

One Name.

Three Persons.

All God.

Paul closes a letter with this:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Not a force.

Not an accessory.

God Himself, drawing near.

He Is a Person

A person speaks.

The Spirit speaks.

“The Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul...’” (Acts 13:2).

A person teaches.

“The Helper... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

A person grieves.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Ephesians 4:30).

A person guides.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

He thinks.

He wills.

He loves (Romans 15:30).

His Role in God’s Plan

The Spirit was active at creation:

“The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

He came upon people for specific tasks — artisans (Exodus 31:3), leaders (Judges 6:34), prophets (Ezekiel 2:2).

He spoke through Scripture’s authors:

“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

He was promised for the New Covenant:

“I will put My Spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:27).

Promised by Jesus

Jesus told His disciples not to start the mission until they received “power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

He called the Spirit “another Helper” — another like Himself (John 14:16).
Not temporary.

Forever.

The Spirit would:

- Teach them all things (John 14:26).
- Bear witness about Jesus (John 15:26).
- Convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).

Why This Matters

If the Spirit is just a force, you might try to use Him.

If the Spirit is God, you submit to Him.

If He is a person, you can know Him.

Talk with Him.

Listen to Him.

Follow Him.

He is not less than the Father or the Son.

He is not newer.

He is eternal.

He is here now.

Jesus said, “He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

That means this:

If you are in Christ, God Himself lives in you.

Closing Reflection

Knowing who the Holy Spirit is changes everything.
We stop treating Him like an occasional guest.
We welcome Him as the indwelling Lord.

He is the presence of God in you.
The voice of God to you.
The power of God through you.

This is not a theological footnote.
It is the Christian life.
Without Him, there is no life at all.

Chapter 5 – The Spirit in the Believer

(Guidance, Conviction, Empowerment)

Some ignore Him.
Some call Him *it*.
Some think of Him as a battery charger.

Many simply forget He's there.

And yet...
If you belong to Jesus, **God Himself lives in you.**

Not beside you.
Not near you.
In you.

Why We Miss Him

The Spirit glorifies Jesus (John 16:14).
He points to the Son, not to Himself.
That's His nature.
So if we're not looking, we can miss His fingerprints.

Some churches rarely mention Him.
Others talk of Him only in signs and wonders.
Both can distort the picture.

Language doesn't help.
We say "it" instead of "He."
We describe Him like a power surge instead of a Person.

And so we live like He's far away —
Praying for help that's already in the house.

Who Is in You?

Paul writes, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Within you.

God’s Spirit.

Jesus said, “He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17).

Not temporarily.

Forever (John 14:16).

Think about that.

The same Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation.

The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11).

Lives in you.

This is not poetry.

It’s reality.

His Work in You

Guidance

Paul says, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

He leads through Scripture He inspired (2 Timothy 3:16).

He prompts through inner conviction, never contradicting the Word.

He opens and closes doors (Acts 16:6–7).

He reminds you what Jesus said when you need it (John 14:26).

Conviction

Jesus said the Spirit would “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8).

He shows you where you’re off course.

He doesn’t crush with condemnation — that’s the enemy’s tactic.

He points you back to the Father.

He trains your conscience to match God’s heart.

Empowerment

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Power to witness.

Power to endure.

Power to love when it costs you.

The Spirit is not just for big moments — He fuels daily obedience.

Why This Changes Everything

If you see the Spirit as a distant helper, you’ll live like you’re on your own.

If you see Him as God in you, you’ll live differently:

- You’ll ask before you move.
- You’ll listen before you speak.
- You’ll step out even when you feel weak.

The Christian life was never meant to be lived in human strength.

Without the Spirit, it’s impossible.

With Him, it’s supernatural — even in the ordinary.

Learning to Follow

Stay in the Word.

The Spirit speaks most clearly through the Scripture He authored.

Pray with openness.

Ask Him to lead.

Ask Him to search you (Psalm 139:23–24).

Listen in the stillness.

Test impressions.

If it contradicts Scripture, it’s not Him.

If it glorifies Christ, lines up with truth, and produces His fruit, follow.

Obey quickly.

Prompt obedience trains your ears to recognize His voice.

The Tragedy of Neglect

Many believers are rich in potential but live in poverty.
They have the Spirit, but they don't draw on His presence.
They pray for what He already gave.
They fight battles without the armor He provides.
They burn out doing Kingdom work in their own strength.

It's like owning a lamp and never plugging it in.

The Joy of Walking With Him

When you yield to the Spirit, the Christian life changes from straining to abiding.
Fruit grows where once there was striving (Galatians 5:22–23).
Courage rises in the face of fear.
Love stretches farther than comfort zones.
Peace holds steady when the world shakes.

You begin to see His fingerprints everywhere —
In the Word coming alive.
In prayers answered in quiet ways.
In strength you didn't know you had.

Closing Reflection

The Spirit is not an "it."
Not a tool.
Not a feeling.

He is God in you.
Your Guide.

Your Convicter.
Your Empowerer.

If you are in Christ, you have Him fully.
The only question is:
Does He have you fully?

Chapter 6 – Living Spirit-Filled

(Walking in Step With Him)

The Spirit is in you.
But is He leading you?
That's the question.

You can have a compass in your pocket and still get lost.
You can have a lamp and never turn it on.
You can have the Spirit and still walk in the flesh.

What “Spirit-Filled” Means

It's not a title for elite Christians.
It's not a one-time event.
It's a way of life.

Paul says, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).
The verb is ongoing.
“Keep being filled.”

Not topped off once.
Continually yielded.

Being filled is about control.
Who directs you?
Who shapes your words, thoughts, choices?

When the Spirit fills, He leads.
When the flesh rules, He grieves.

The Daily Walk

Paul writes, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

Walking is steady.
Step by step.
Moment by moment.

Walking in the Spirit means:

- Listening for His prompting.
- Obeying quickly.
- Letting His fruit ripen in you.

It's not about hype.
It's about habit.

Between the Gardens

The Spirit is how we live between the gardens.
The first garden was lost.
The final garden is promised.

In the meantime, the Spirit sustains.
Guides.
Comforts.
Equips.

Jesus sent Him so we would not be orphans (John 14:18).
Without Him, we wander.
With Him, we walk toward home.

How to Stay Full

Stay in the Word.
The Spirit authored it (2 Peter 1:21).
He speaks through it still.

Stay in prayer.

Prayer is not only asking.

It's aligning.

It's listening.

Stay in fellowship.

The Spirit works in the Body (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Lone Christians drift.

Stay obedient.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Love and obedience feed filling.

Stay repentant.

Sin grieves the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

Confession restores joy.

Signs You're Walking in Step

Love where there was indifference.

Peace where there was anxiety.

Patience where there was irritation.

Kindness where there was self-protection.

These are not personality tweaks.

They are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

You can fake them for a while.

You can't sustain them without Him.

Obstacles to Spirit-Filled Living

Self-Reliance — “I can handle this.”

Neglect — Ignoring time with God.

Distraction — Crowding out His voice with noise.

Unconfessed Sin — Letting walls grow between you and Him.

The fix?
Surrender again.
Every day.
Every hour if needed.

The Spirit and the Mission

The Spirit doesn't fill you so you can feel spiritual.
He fills you for mission.
"You will receive power... and you will be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Every conversation.
Every act of love.
Every moment of courage —
These are Spirit-fueled.

He is preparing you for the final garden by shaping you in the now.

The Invitation

Living Spirit-filled isn't about trying harder.
It's about yielding sooner.

The Spirit is already in you.
The gates of the final garden are ahead.
The road between is His territory.

Let Him lead.
Let Him fill.
Let Him keep you until home.

Closing Reflection

The Christian life without the Spirit is just moral effort.
With the Spirit, it is supernatural life.

We live between the gardens.
The Spirit is our daily manna.
Our living water.
Our constant companion.

Don't just have Him.
Follow Him.
Until the day faith becomes sight.

Chapter 7 – Baptism - Symbol and Seal

(What Baptism Represents)

Baptism is simple.

Water.

A person.

A moment.

But it's more than getting wet.

It's more than joining a church.

It's more than tradition.

Baptism is a picture.

A seal.

A public declaration.

A spiritual milestone.

A Picture of the Gospel

Paul writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that... we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3–4).

Down into the water — buried with Christ.

Up out of the water — raised with Christ.

Baptism tells the story without words:

I died with Him.

I live with Him.

I belong to Him.

A Seal of Allegiance

In the early church, baptism was a line in the sand.

In Rome, it was declaring, “Jesus is Lord” — not Caesar.

In Jewish communities, it was saying, “I follow the Messiah” — even if family walked away.

Baptism is not a private act.

It’s an open pledge of allegiance to the King.

Peter says, “Baptism... now saves you... as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

It’s not magic water.

It’s a public yes to God’s covenant.

An Act of Obedience

Jesus commanded it:

“Go... make disciples... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism doesn’t earn salvation.

It follows salvation.

It’s love expressed through obedience (John 14:15).

When the Ethiopian eunuch believed, he said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36).

Nothing did.

They went down into the water right away.

A Moment of Spiritual Declaration

Baptism also announces something to the spiritual realm.

Paul says God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

Baptism marks that transfer.

It's declaring to the enemy, "I don't belong to you anymore."

It's telling the watching world, "I am Christ's."

Why This Matters Between the Gardens

We live between Eden and the New Jerusalem.

Baptism is an act that roots us in both.

It looks back — to the death and resurrection that secured our way home.

It looks forward — to the day we will rise for the final time, never to die again.

It's a symbol now, but one day it will be fulfilled in full reality.

Closing Reflection

Baptism is water, yes.

But it's more than water.

It's a sermon in action.

A wedding vow in public.

A declaration to heaven and earth.

It says:

I have died with Christ.

I have been raised with Christ.

I belong to Christ.

And I am not ashamed to say so.

Chapter 8 – Why Baptism Is Often Misunderstood or Overlooked

Baptism is one of the simplest commands in Scripture.
It's also one of the most debated.

Some see it as a tradition.
Some treat it as optional.
Some confuse it with salvation itself.

And many — perhaps most — fail to understand its place in the Christian life.

When It Becomes a Box to Check

For some, baptism is the thing you do to “join the church.”
Fill out the card.
Attend the class.
Get dunked.
Move on.

But baptism is not a line on a spiritual résumé.
It's the outward sign of an inward reality.
It should never be done just because “it's time.”

When It's Confused With Salvation

Others see baptism as the *means* of salvation.
They point to verses like “*Baptism... now saves you*” (1 Peter 3:21) without reading the rest: “*...not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.*”

Water doesn't save.
Jesus saves.
Baptism points to Him.

When It's Treated as a Personal Option

Some simply skip it.
They believe.
They follow Christ.
But baptism feels unnecessary.

Maybe they fear speaking in public.
Maybe they think private faith is enough.
Maybe no one has ever explained why it matters.

But every example in the New Testament shows belief followed by baptism — often immediately.
The Philippian jailer “*was baptized at once, he and all his family*” (Acts 16:33).

When Its Spiritual Significance Is Overlooked

Baptism isn't just for people to see.
It's for the unseen as well.

It's a declaration to the powers of darkness that you've changed kingdoms (Colossians 1:13).
It's a rallying cry to the family of faith that you've joined the mission.
It's a visible act of spiritual warfare — announcing whose side you're on.

Jesus put it plainly: “*Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels*” (Luke 9:26).

Baptism is our way of saying, “I am not ashamed.”

Between the Gardens

Between Eden and the New Jerusalem, baptism marks our identity.
It is the moment we stand in the open and say,
*“I am no longer hiding in shame — I belong to Christ, and I am part of His
work until He brings me home.”*

That’s why the early church risked persecution to be baptized.
That’s why it mattered more than comfort or reputation.

Why We Miss It

We miss baptism’s meaning because:

- We downplay the public cost of following Jesus.
- We don’t see the spiritual warfare behind allegiance.
- We treat it as optional, forgetting it was commanded.
- We fail to connect it to the bigger story — the garden to garden journey.

Closing Reflection

Baptism is not a magical act.
But it is a powerful one.

It says more than you may realize.
It declares:

- To God: “I obey and trust You.”
- To the church: “I’m with you in the mission.”
- To the world: “I follow Jesus.”
- To the enemy: “You’ve lost your claim on me.”

No wonder the enemy would rather we keep it quiet.
No wonder Jesus commands we make it public.

Chapter 9 – Why Belief Must Precede Baptism

Baptism without belief is just a bath.

It may be moving.

It may be memorable.

But without faith, it changes nothing.

The Pattern in Scripture

Every baptism in the New Testament follows the same order:

- 1. Hear the gospel**
- 2. Believe in Christ**
- 3. Be baptized**

On Pentecost, Peter told the crowd:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

Repentance first.

Baptism second.

When the Ethiopian eunuch heard the good news, he said, *“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”*

Philip replied, *“If you believe with all your heart, you may”* (Acts 8:36–37).

Belief was the prerequisite.

Why the Order Matters

If baptism came first, it would be an empty ritual.

It would put the emphasis on the water, not on the One who saves.

Baptism is a declaration, not a cause.

It announces what has already happened in the heart.

Without belief, the sign points to nothing.

Faith Is the Connection Point

Faith connects us to Christ's death and resurrection.

Baptism illustrates that connection — dying with Him, being raised to new life (Romans 6:3–4).

No faith?

No death to the old self.

No resurrection to the new.

You can be drenched head to toe and still be dry in the soul.

Why Infant Baptism Creates Tension

This is where the conversation can get uncomfortable.

Some churches baptize infants as a sign of inclusion in the covenant community.

But the New Testament never shows baptism apart from personal belief.

Infant dedication?

Yes — Scripture supports the idea of committing a child to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:27–28).

But baptism, biblically, follows a personal response to the gospel.

Between the Gardens

In Eden, man chose to trust his own word over God's.

In the New Jerusalem, every citizen will be there because they believed God's word and acted on it.

Baptism in the in-between is our way of saying,

“I believe You — here and now — and I will follow You until I see You face to face.”

It's not a superstition.
It's not a family tradition.
It's the overflow of a heart that has been changed.

Closing Reflection

Baptism matters.
But belief matters more.

The thief on the cross was never baptized — and Jesus still said, “*Today you will be with Me in paradise*” (Luke 23:43).

Baptism can't replace faith.
It can only confirm it.

And when belief comes first, baptism becomes more than a ceremony.
It becomes a proclamation:
“I've crossed over from death to life. I belong to Jesus. And I'm not going back.”

Chapter 10 — Faith and Works — Living in Two Kingdoms

We live in two places at once.

Two kingdoms.

Two realities.

The first — the one you can see — is temporary.

The second — the one you can't yet see — is eternal.

The Bible calls us *citizens of heaven* (Philippians 3:20).

But for now, our feet still walk on soil that will one day pass away.

Saved by Faith

Your place in the eternal kingdom comes by faith alone.

Not works.

Not merit.

Not a résumé of good deeds.

Paul wrote it clearly: “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast*” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

If that's where it ended, we might think faith is only about believing certain truths in our head.

But that's not how Scripture treats it.

Working in the Present

Faith changes us.

Real faith moves us.

James said, “*Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*” (James 2:17).

We're not working to earn salvation — we're working because salvation has already claimed us.

The same Paul who said we're saved by grace also said we're “*created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10).

Between the Gardens

From Eden to the New Jerusalem — that's the garden-to-garden story.
In the first garden, Adam and Eve had meaningful work before sin entered.
In the last garden, we'll once again serve God face-to-face (Revelation 22:3).

We live in between.
Faith roots us in what's coming.
Works make that coming kingdom visible here and now.

When we forgive, serve, give, and love — we plant seeds of the future garden in the soil of this passing world.

The Two Kingdoms Lens

Think of faith as citizenship papers.
You belong to the eternal kingdom.

Think of works as living out the customs of that kingdom while you're still in this one.

In the kingdom to come, there is no greed, no hatred, no selfishness.
So in this kingdom, we practice generosity, peace, and love — even when the culture runs the other way.

The Right Order

Faith first.
Works follow.

If you flip the order, you get religion without relationship.
If you remove works, you get belief without evidence.

Both distort the gospel.

Jesus put it in agricultural terms: “*By their fruit you will recognize them*” (Matthew 7:16).

Fruit doesn’t cause the tree to live — it proves the tree is alive.

Sustaining the Balance

Some lean so hard on faith alone that they dismiss the call to obedience.
Others fixate on doing, doing, doing — forgetting that apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Living in two kingdoms requires both:

- Resting in what Christ has done.
- Acting in line with who Christ has made you to be.

Faith opens the door to the kingdom.
Works keep the light on so others can find it.

Chapter 11 — Faith and Works — Why the Confusion Persists

Some Christians hear “faith and works” and flinch.

It feels like mixing oil and water.

They remember Ephesians 2:8–9 and stop there: “*It is the gift of God — not by works.*”

Others swing the other way.

They measure their standing with God by the amount they serve, give, or sacrifice.

The result?

Either pride or burnout.

Why It’s Confusing

Part of the problem is the Bible speaks strongly on both sides.

Paul says, “*We maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law*” (Romans 3:28).

James says, “*A person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone*” (James 2:24).

Put side by side, those verses can look like a contradiction.

They’re not.

They’re just looking at faith from two angles:

- **Paul** — How we’re made right before God.
- **James** — How we show that we’re right with God.

Law vs. Life

Paul was fighting the idea that you could be saved by obeying the Law of Moses.

James was fighting the idea that you could claim faith without any evidence in your life.

Both were defending the gospel.

Both were protecting against counterfeits.

Our Natural Drift

We like formulas.

If we can reduce faith to a checklist, we feel in control.

If we can reduce it to a one-time belief, we feel free from responsibility.

But God didn't design either system.

He designed a relationship.

Faith without works is like a marriage where the vows were said, but no love is shown afterward.

Works without faith is like performing the duties of marriage without ever saying "I do."

Scripture That Gets Twisted

Some take "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12) to mean we earn salvation by effort.

But Paul finishes the sentence: "*for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose*" (Philippians 2:13).

It's His work in us that produces the works through us.

Others quote "*we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law*" as if that means apart from obedience altogether.

But the "law" Paul meant was the old covenant system — not the life of love and obedience Jesus calls us to now.

Between the Gardens, Again

This is why our garden-to-garden view helps.

In Eden, Adam and Eve didn't work to become God's children — they worked because they were God's children.

In the New Jerusalem, we won't serve to earn a place — we'll serve because we belong there.

Here in the middle, it's the same.

We work because we're His.

We obey because we love Him (John 14:15).

Confusion fades when we keep faith and works in their right place:

Faith is the root.

Works are the fruit.

Chapter 12 — Faith and Works — Strengthening Both

Faith and works aren't rivals.
They're partners.
When one grows, the other follows.

A strong faith fuels good works.
Good works feed faith.
Neglect one, and the other will weaken.

Fuel for Faith

Romans 10:17 says, *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."*

If faith is the root, it has to be nourished.

That means:

- Time in the Word.
- Time with God in prayer.
- Time among believers who speak truth.

Faith grows when we see God's promises in Scripture and watch Him keep them in our lives.

Every answered prayer, every unexpected provision, every moment of peace in chaos — these are fertilizer for the root.

Fuel for Works

Hebrews 10:24 says, *"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."*

That means thinking about it on purpose.

It's not "good works by accident."

It's a life aimed at showing God's love.

When we act in love — forgiving, giving, serving, speaking truth — something happens in us:

Faith strengthens.

We see God's hand moving through our obedience, and our confidence in Him grows.

Why the Balance Matters

Faith without works will wither.

Jesus said, *“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Matthew 7:19).

Works without faith will burn us out.

We end up like Martha — busy, anxious, and missing the better part (Luke 10:38–42).

But faith with works?

That's the life Jesus calls “abundant” (John 10:10).

Between the Gardens

In Eden, faith and works were one seamless life.

No tension.

No debate.

In the New Jerusalem, they will be again.

But here — between the gardens — we have to keep them in balance.

We have to feed faith with the truth of God's Word and fuel works with love for His people.

The more faith you have, the more you will want to obey.

The more you obey, the more your faith will grow.

That's how we live in two kingdoms at once — and stay ready for the one to come.

Chapter 13 — Free Will vs Predestination?

Chosen and Responsible

God is sovereign.

Man is responsible.

Both are true.

Both are in Scripture.

God Chooses

Ephesians 1:4 says, “*He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.*”

Before Adam breathed, God already knew who would be His.

Romans 8:29–30 calls it foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification — a chain only God can hold.

It’s not random.

It’s not cold.

It’s love from before time.

Man Responds

Joshua told Israel, “*Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*” (Joshua 24:15).

Jesus said, “*Come to Me, all you who are weary*” (Matthew 11:28).

The invitation is real.

The choice is real.

No one comes unless the Father draws them (John 6:44).

But no one is forced.

Every “yes” is an act of the will — empowered, yes, but still our “yes.”

Not a Contradiction

To our minds, these sound like opposites.
If God has chosen, how can we choose?
If we can choose, how is God's choice real?

The Bible doesn't flinch at holding both.
Paul writes about God's election in Romans 9, then turns around in Romans 10 and says, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"
He doesn't explain away one with the other.
He declares both.

Between the Gardens

In Eden, God placed man in a perfect world with both His sovereignty and man's freedom intact.
In the New Jerusalem, we'll again live in harmony with His perfect will — never wanting to turn away.

But here, between the gardens, we wrestle with the mystery.
We see enough to know both are true, but not enough to map the mind of God.

We don't have to pick a side to worship.
We don't have to solve the equation to obey.
We just have to trust the One who both chooses and calls.

Chapter 14—When Definitions Divide

We Use the Same Words

But We Mean Different Things

Christians say:

“God is sovereign.”

“Man has free will.”

“God chooses.”

“We choose.”

We nod in agreement.

Then we find out we mean something completely different.

Example:

- For one believer, “*predestined*” means God selected a fixed list of individuals before time, and no one can change it.
- For another, it means God knew beforehand who would respond to His grace and set their path accordingly.

Same word. Different definition.

Same Bible. Different lens.

Why the Definitions Differ

Our backgrounds shape us.

- If you grew up hearing about the greatness of God, you may focus on His control, His power, His glory.
- If you grew up hearing about the urgency of decision, you may focus on your personal choice, your responsibility, your faith.

Neither is wrong — unless it blinds us to the other half of the truth.

Scriptures That Pull in Both Directions

Romans 9: *“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy... It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”*

Joshua 24: *“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”*

John 6:44: *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them.”*

2 Peter 3:9: *“[He is] not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

We like to choose our side and highlight the verses that match.
But the Bible doesn’t arrange itself into our neat theological boxes.

Tilted Perspectives

A God-centered view, without room for human responsibility, can lead to fatalism:

“If God has already chosen, nothing I do matters.”

A man-centered view, without room for God’s sovereignty, can lead to pride:

“I found God because I was wise enough to choose Him.”

Both miss the mark.

The Bible doesn’t choose one over the other — it holds both together.

The Danger of Drawing Battle Lines

The early church had its debates.

Paul told Timothy: *“Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen”* (2 Timothy 2:14).

Doctrinal precision matters.

But so does love, humility, and unity.

When we let this divide us into camps, we turn the mystery of salvation into a competition.

The Humility of Mystery

Paul saw both sides clearly — and didn't try to erase one for the sake of the other.

- In Romans 9, he speaks of God's absolute right to choose.
- In Romans 10, he invites "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord" to be saved.

He doesn't explain *how* they fit.

He simply declares both, then closes Romans 11 with worship:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!"

Between the Gardens

In Eden, Adam didn't ask whether he had free will or was predestined — he just walked with God.

In the New Jerusalem, we'll see fully and understand how His choice and our choice are one.

For now, between the gardens, we live in the tension.

We obey because we're called.

We're called because He loves.

And maybe the real danger is not misunderstanding the definitions, but forgetting that salvation — however it works — is all grace from start to finish.

Chapter 15 — The God Who Knows and Calls

A Bigger Table

The Bible's story isn't a courtroom debate between "Predestination" and "Free Will."

It's a feast.

And God is the Host.

He knew the guest list before the world began (Ephesians 1:4).

He also sends out open invitations to "whoever will" (Revelation 22:17).

Both are true.

Both belong.

God's Knowing Is Not Our Forcing

We tend to think:

"If God knows, then my choice isn't real."

But knowing is not the same as causing.

A parent may know their child will choose chocolate ice cream every time.

That doesn't mean the child's choice is fake.

God's foreknowledge is perfect — but His knowledge doesn't rob your will of meaning.

The Call That Wakes the Dead

The Bible says we were "*dead in our sins*" (Ephesians 2:1).

Dead people don't respond unless life is given first.

That's what Jesus meant when He said:

"No one can come to Me unless the Father draws them" (John 6:44).

His call is life-giving.

It awakens desire.

It gives us the ability to say “yes” to what we would otherwise ignore.

The Choice That Honors the Call

But once awakened, we are called to respond.

Joshua’s challenge still stands:

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

God won’t force Himself on you.

His love invites, persuades, and woos — but never coerces.

Living in the Both/And

Paul said to the Philippians:

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose” (Philippians 2:12–13).

Both are there:

- You work it out.
- God works in you.

Salvation is 100% God’s work.

But it calls for 100% of your response.

Between the Gardens

In Eden, man had the power to choose obedience or rebellion — and he chose rebellion.

In the New Jerusalem, our wills will be so aligned with His that sin won’t even cross our minds.

Here, between the gardens, we live in the tension.

Called by grace.

Choosing to follow.

Our job is not to solve the mystery, but to live faithfully in it.

Why This Matters

If you lean only on God's choosing, you might stop sharing the gospel — thinking it's already decided.

If you lean only on man's choosing, you might live in fear that you'll lose it at any moment.

But when you see both together — His sovereignty and your responsibility — you'll share boldly and walk humbly.

And maybe that's the point.

To rest in the God who both knows and calls.

And to run the race, knowing He has already set the finish line.

Chapter 16 — Tithing

We Own Nothing

The Illusion of Possession

We speak as if we own things.

My house.

My paycheck.

My retirement.

But Scripture cuts through the illusion:

*“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.” — Psalm 24:1*

Nothing here was made by us.

Nothing here will leave with us.

We are not owners — we are stewards.

Between the Gardens

In Eden, Adam was placed in a garden he did not plant, filled with resources he did not create.

His role?

Tend it. Keep it. Enjoy it.

But not own it.

In the New Jerusalem, the same truth will stand — the city is God’s, the river of life flows from His throne, the fruit grows without our effort.

Even there, in the eternal garden, we will live as joyful stewards, not self-made owners.

Between the gardens, God trains us to live with open hands.

Tithing is one way He does it.

The Purpose of Tithing

The tithe was not invented to help God balance a budget.
He has no need.

It was given so *we* would remember where our bread comes from.

When Israel was commanded to bring the first tenth, it was a declaration of dependence:

“But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” — Deuteronomy 8:18

Tithing is not primarily about funding a temple, church, or ministry.

It’s about planting a truth deep in our hearts:

“I own nothing. All I have is from Him. And I trust Him enough to release the first and best.”

Firstfruits, Not Leftovers

God asked for the *firstfruits* — not whatever remained after the bills and indulgences.

Proverbs 3:9–10 says:

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

The order matters.

When we give God the first, we remind ourselves that He is the source, and everything else falls under His provision.

The Daily Bread Connection

Jesus taught us to pray: “*Give us today our daily bread.*” — Matthew 6:11
Daily bread is a picture of continual provision.
Not stockpiled security. Not control.

Tithing is like pre-emptively saying thank you.
It’s recognizing that even our ability to earn is a gift from the Creator who keeps our hearts beating and our lungs drawing breath.

Why It’s Hard

If this is true, why do we struggle to give?

Because tithing strikes at the heart of two illusions:

- 1. I own this.**
- 2. I control my future.**

When those illusions are exposed, our security shifts from possessions to the Provider.
That shift feels risky — unless we trust Him.

A Kingdom Economy

In God’s Kingdom, giving does not deplete you.
Jesus said: “*Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.*” — Luke 6:38

This is not prosperity-gospel math.
It’s Kingdom economy: resources are entrusted to those who will use them for the King’s purposes.

The question is never, “Can I afford to tithe?”
It’s, “Can I afford to close my hand to the One who owns everything?”

Practicing Heaven Now

In eternity, there will be no greed, no pride, no hoarding.
We will delight in seeing resources flow freely for God's glory.
Tithing trains us for that reality now.

It loosens the grip of money on our hearts.
It shifts our trust to the God who gives and sustains.
It reminds us that we are part of a much bigger story — a Kingdom that will
outlast every economy on earth.

Between the Gardens, With Open Hands

Tithing is not a tax.
It is an act of worship.
A weekly (or monthly) reminder that the soil, the seed, the rain, and the
breath to labor are all gifts.

It is our way of saying — with our actions, not just our words —
“You are my Provider. I will trust You with my first and best.”

Because in truth, we own nothing.
And that's the best news for a steward of the King.

Chapter 17—When Greed and Pride Get in the Way

The Real Barrier

When we talk about tithing, we often pretend the problem is confusion.

“How much should I give?”

“Do I tithe on gross or net?”

“Is tithing still required in the New Testament?”

But deep down, the problem isn't confusion.

It's resistance.

Greed and pride are the real enemies of an open hand.

Greed: The Fear of Not Enough

Greed isn't just wanting more — it's the fear of not having enough.

It's rooted in scarcity thinking:

“If I give, I won't have what I need.”

It whispers:

“God might not come through.”

“You need to protect yourself.”

“You can be generous later — once you're secure.”

But in the Garden, Adam and Eve had *enough*.

They lacked nothing — yet still grasped for more.

Greed has never been about need.

It's always been about mistrust.

Pride: The Illusion of Self-Made

Pride says:

“I worked for this. I earned it. It's mine to do with as I please.”

It forgets Deuteronomy 8:18:

“But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

Pride resists giving because giving admits dependence.
And dependence doesn't fit the self-made narrative.

The Garden to Garden Reality

In the first garden, man's role was to tend what was God's.
In the final garden, man will steward the resources of eternity for God's glory.

Between the gardens, greed and pride tempt us to act like owners instead of stewards.

Tithing — or any consistent giving — is spiritual warfare against those temptations.

Why This is Spiritual Warfare

The enemy doesn't mind if you attend church or claim to believe in God, as long as your trust remains in your possessions.

Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” — Matthew 6:24

Every time you give — especially when it stretches you — you are declaring war on greed's hold over your heart.

You are reminding pride that your life is not your own.

Stories That Expose the Heart

Jesus sat in the temple watching people put their gifts into the treasury.

The rich gave large amounts.

A poor widow put in two small coins.

“Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” — Luke 21:3–4

God doesn’t measure the amount.

He measures the surrender.

When We Close Our Hands

Greed hoards.

Pride controls.

Both lead to the same place — closed hands that cannot receive more from God.

Proverbs 11:24–25 says:

“One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”

Closed hands not only refuse to give — they refuse to be filled.

The Antidote

The cure for greed is trust.

The cure for pride is humility.

Tithing requires both:

- **Trust** that God will provide what you need.
- **Humility** to admit all you have was given to you.

When you give, you are actively reshaping your heart into the posture of heaven — a place where everything flows from God and for God.

Between the Gardens

We live in a temporary kingdom where greed and pride are rewarded.
But we belong to an eternal Kingdom where generosity and humility are the currency.

Every gift you release is a rehearsal for eternity.
Every tithe is a declaration:
“I trust You more than I trust what’s in my hand.”

Between the gardens, the battle for our hearts will rage.
Greed and pride will keep knocking.
But an open hand is a closed door to both.

Chapter 18 – Garden to Garden: Why It Matters & The Story

We've hinted at this before.
Now it's time to lay it out plainly.

This is the thread that holds the whole book together.
It's the key that makes sense of salvation, the Holy Spirit, baptism, faith and works, even tithing.

It's the Garden to Garden story.

Why We're Talking About This Now

Many have heard salvation explained like a formula.
Admit you're a sinner.
Believe in Jesus.
Confess Him as Lord.
Done.

That's true — but it feels detached to many.
It's easy to nod along without seeing *why* any of it makes sense.

Garden to Garden changes that.
It's not a formula.
It's the storyline of the Bible itself.
And it shows why God's plan isn't arbitrary.
Why it isn't "just believe or else."

It's about going back home.
Not to some vague cloud-filled heaven.
But to the home you were made for.
The one in the very first chapters of Genesis.
The one in the last chapters of Revelation.

The Story

In the beginning, God planted a garden.
He placed man and woman in it.
Not as pets.
Not as slaves.
As His children.
As His image-bearers.

They were given life, beauty, purpose, and authority.
They were to tend creation with Him.
Walk with Him.
Talk with Him.
See Him face to face.

Then came the break.
They trusted the serpent's voice over God's.
Sin entered.
The relationship shattered.

God cannot tolerate sin in His presence.
Not because He is cold,
but because His holiness is like the sun —
pure, blazing, and unable to mix with darkness.

So humanity was exiled.
Cut off from the Tree of Life.
Cut off from God's direct presence.

But God didn't abandon us.
He began a plan of restoration.
Promises to Abraham.
The Law through Moses.
Prophets who cried for repentance.
A line of kings — mostly failures — pointing to a true King.

And then, Jesus.
The Son of God who became man.

The One who succeeded where Adam failed.
The One Paul called the “last Adam” — not to replace the Trinity, but to show He started a new humanity.

He took our sin.
Died our death.
Rose to break death’s power.
And opened the way back to God.

The story ends — or rather begins again — in another garden.
The New Jerusalem.
The river of life flowing from God’s throne.
The Tree of Life bearing fruit for the nations.
No curse.
No death.
God dwelling with His people again.
Face to face.

Why It Changes Everything

With Garden to Garden in mind, salvation isn’t just escaping hell.
It’s God’s work to bring you back home.
To restore the relationship, the purpose, and the future you were made for.

It explains the Holy Spirit — the presence of God in you now, sustaining you until that day.

It explains baptism — your public crossing from the old garden’s exile into the promise of the new.

It explains faith and works — trusting God now and living as citizens of the Kingdom that’s coming.

It even explains tithing — living as if everything belongs to God, because it does.

This isn’t new.
It’s the oldest story in the world.
It just hasn’t always been told this way.

And when you see it, you start to understand why all of Scripture points one direction —
from the Garden where we fell,
to the Garden where God makes all things new.

Chapter 19 – Voices Through the Ages: Those Who Agree

We didn't invent this.

It's not some clever new lens for the Bible.

From the earliest days of the church, believers have seen the Bible's arc —
from creation and Eden lost,
to restoration and Eden regained.

They may not have called it *Garden to Garden*,
but the thread is there in their words.
And their insight anchors ours.

Irenaeus (2nd Century)

A disciple of Polycarp.

Polycarp was a disciple of John the Apostle.

That's just one step away from Jesus Himself.

Irenaeus wrote about *recapitulation* —
the idea that Christ re-lived humanity's story,
succeeding where Adam failed,
and restoring what Adam lost.

He saw Jesus not just as Savior from sin,
but as the One who brings us back to the life God intended from the start.

Augustine (4th–5th Century)

Augustine often spoke of humanity's fall from paradise,
and the final restoration in God's eternal city.

In *The City of God*,
he painted a picture of two cities —

the City of Man, marred by sin,
and the City of God, where righteousness dwells.

He linked Genesis to Revelation,
seeing the last chapters of the Bible as the undoing of the first tragedy.

John Calvin (16th Century)

Calvin's focus was often on God's covenant.
And in his view,
the covenant promise was always about restoration —
not just rescue from punishment,
but return to the blessings of life with God.

For Calvin, salvation's end was communion with God in His presence,
something the first Adam lost,
and the last Adam secured.

Jonathan Edwards (18th Century)

Edwards, the preacher of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*,
also preached of the joy and beauty of God's final Kingdom.
He saw salvation as entry into the "world of love"
— a perfected creation where God and His people dwell together forever.

He tied this to Eden's lost fellowship
and Revelation's promise of restored intimacy.

C.S. Lewis (20th Century)

Lewis, though not a theologian in the formal sense,
spoke vividly about longing.
That ache we all feel for a home we've never seen.
He called it *sehnsucht* — a deep, unnameable yearning.

In *The Last Battle*, the final book of the Narnia series, he ends with his characters stepping into the “real Narnia,” where the story is only beginning — echoing Revelation’s restored garden.

N.T. Wright (21st Century)

Perhaps no modern voice has championed this return-to-restoration theme more clearly.

Wright warns against shrinking the gospel into “going to heaven when you die.”

In books like *Surprised by Hope*, he argues that the biblical hope is resurrection, new creation, and God’s dwelling with His people once more — just as in the beginning, but now perfected forever.

For Wright, the cross and resurrection are not ends in themselves, but the decisive victory that makes the *new Eden* certain.

The story starts in a garden, is redeemed in a garden tomb, and ends in a garden city — God with us, face to face.

Why This Matters

When voices from the 2nd century to today speak of the same arc, we’re not playing with a clever new idea.

We’re joining a chorus that’s been singing the same melody for two thousand years: God made us for His presence.

Sin drove us from it.
Christ brings us home.

That is the shape of the gospel.
That is the hope we live for.

Chapter 20 - From Garden to Garden: Hope, Reason, and Responsibility

It began in a garden.

It will end in a garden.

The story in between explains why we are here — and where we are going.

This is not sentimental.

It's rational.

It's the only story that makes sense of the human condition,
of our longing,
of our failures,
and of our hope.

Why This Gives Hope

The first garden was lost.

The second is promised.

The distance between them is our life.

We are not drifting toward nothingness.

We are moving toward restoration.

*“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.
He will dwell with them, and they will be His people,
and God Himself will be with them as their God.
He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
and death shall be no more.”*

— Revelation 21:3–4

That is where this ends.

Not clouds.

Not harps.

But life as it was meant to be.

Every healed body,
every reconciled relationship,
every moment of pure joy in God's presence —
forever.

Why This Makes Sense

Without this frame, salvation feels arbitrary.
A ticket punched.
A system gamed.

But with it, the pieces fit.
God made us for Himself.
We broke the relationship.
He came to restore it — at His own cost.

Sin is not just “breaking rules.”
It is the fracture of everything good.
It cannot live in His presence.

Christ is not just a moral example.
He is the way back into the presence we lost.
The bridge between gardens.

The Holy Spirit is not an optional upgrade.
He is the life of the coming garden
planted in you now.

Baptism is not empty ritual.
It is stepping into the story —
dying to the wilderness,
rising toward home.

Faith and works are not in competition.
Faith is trusting the story.
Works are living it out.

Tithing is not paying dues.
It is acknowledging that every resource in the wilderness
is already His.

Why This Brings Responsibility

If this is true,
then Christianity is not a spectator sport.

We are not just “waiting it out” until the second garden appears.
We are emissaries.
Builders.
Seed-planters.

We carry His light into dark places.
We live as citizens of the Kingdom that is coming.

*“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*
— 1 Corinthians 15:58

Our faith is personal,
but never private.
Our hope is certain,
but never passive.

Every act of love,
every word of truth,
every moment we reflect Christ’s character —
is Kingdom work.
Work that will last into eternity.

Why This Story Is Worth Following

Other worldviews end in the grave.
Or in the loss of self.
Or in endless cycles without resolution.

The garden-to-garden story ends with God.
Face to face.
Home.

It tells you why you were made.
Why life is hard.
Why Christ came.
And why your life now matters eternally.

It is not blind faith.
It is faith anchored in a coherent, consistent, historic revelation —
one that millions before us have trusted,
and millions after us will see fulfilled.

The Invitation

If you are in Christ,
you are already part of this story.
Live like it.

If you are not,
the door is still open.
The same Jesus who said “*It is finished*”
also says “*Come to Me.*”

The second garden is coming.
It is perfect.
It is forever.

And it is worth everything you have.

Prayer

Father of all creation,
You planted the first garden and called it good.
You formed us in Your image,
breathed life into our lungs,
and walked with us in the cool of the day.

We confess — we have walked away.
We have chosen our own path more than once,
and the distance between us is our own doing.
Yet You, in mercy, have been moving toward us ever since.
You gave us promises through the prophets.
You gave us hope through Your Son.
You gave us power through Your Spirit.

We do not take lightly this chance to learn and to see You more clearly.
We ask for humility when we are tempted to think we already understand.
We ask for courage when truth unsettles our comfortable patterns.
We ask for endurance when following You feels costly.

Lord, use these pages to knit our hearts to Yours.
Help us see that salvation is not a ticket, but a restoration.
Help us recognize that the Spirit is not an “it” but You, dwelling in us.
Help us embrace baptism, faith, works, and generosity
as joyful participation in Your Kingdom.

Father, keep us mindful that the second garden is real.
Every act of love now is a seed for that eternal place.
Every choice to obey is a step toward home.
Let us live this life in the light of that day.

We are listening.
We are learning.
We are Yours.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
the Way back to the garden,
Amen.