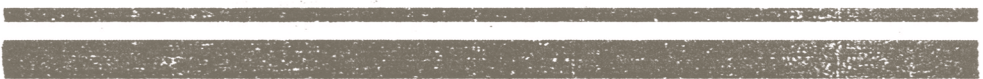




REDEEMED

**GRACE TO LIVE EVERY DAY
BETTER THAN BEFORE**



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INTRODUCTION

Hello dear friends,

A couple of years ago, my son, Grayson, spent the summer serving alongside a ministry in South America. Sometime before he left, our family was having a pretty typical kitchen-counter discussion. I'm sure there was some random philosophical question, with a little science, math, theology, and some mama-Bible-quoting thrown in.

I have no idea where our discussion was headed that day, but I think it was something about differing perspectives on Christian worldview. After a while, Grayson said he looked forward to discussing similar things with the people he would be serving in South America. From the little I knew about where he was going, I didn't think he was going to meet many people anxious to discuss worldviews. I told him, "Baby, I hate to disappoint you, but I don't think most of the people you're going to meet will give a rip about any of this. They have a heart problem caused by a sin problem. They just want to be happy and have no idea why they're miserable or lonely or scared, or why they keep living they way they do. God is sending you to tell them Jesus is the answer. His forgiveness is the way. They need to know the very real, very present love of God to redeem their lives. They need the most important thing!"

That's kind of how I feel about this study. We could spend our time working through a hundred different redemption

details, but knowing more about being redeemed is not the most important thing. The actual, ongoing transformation of a life being redeemed by God is the most important thing.

So here's what this study is about and what I hope you gain:

Your life being redeemed and continuing to be redeemed until you are home with God in heaven

A biblical understanding of what it means to be redeemed

The ability to explain being redeemed to someone who doesn't know God, and the confidence to invite them to be redeemed because of what He has done for you

A beautiful, grace-filled walk with Jesus Christ

A group of friends who are being redeemed alongside you.

That's exactly why we've changed up the format with this study. I'm trying to do everything I can with words on a page, to connect your very real, everyday life with the very, real presence and power of God. Here's all I know: When those two things intersect, lives are going to change. Healing will happen. Prayers will be answered. You will know God even more intimately as your Redeemer. Your life will give evidence of being redeemed. And you will tell others what God has done.

Last year, our family committed to 40 days of prayer. Our 40 days wasn't anything fancy or hard, just an individual commitment to

be intentional about praying every single day. We began with empty prayer journals and asked God what He wanted us to pray about in those days.

Because our family's 40 days were so profound and powerful, and because a 6-week Bible study has 42 days from start to finish, this study includes 40 days of prayer. In addition to praying each day, I'm also hoping you'll join us in reading through the Book of Psalms and meditating on the verses. Check out "40 Days: The Psalms, Meditation, and Prayer" on page 188 for more info.

I am praying this is not a sweet, little sugar-coated Bible study. I'm praying for fire. *Lord God, set our hearts ablaze!* I'm praying for God's great redemption truth to collide head-on and full-force with your greatest need. If God does what I believe He wants to do, some things in your life and mine are getting ready to change for good. Being changed for good doesn't mean every step along the way will be easy, or that every truth will make you feel warm and fuzzy. But God has made a covenant with us that a life being redeemed is the better life. May we long for God's better. May these weeks become a life-changing encounter with God. And when this book is finished, I hope God has begun something inside your soul that doesn't end. You want to keep reading His Word. You want to keep praying in His presence. You want to keep being redeemed.

If I were sitting across from you right now, I'd lean in and say,

My new friend, you are truly known and precious to God. Please don't be afraid or intimidated by His holy love. God did not bring you to this study to condemn you. He brought you here to speak to you and to help you. God made each one of us creative, unique, beautiful, and interesting. And by His grace, you and I can still become all our Father dreamed we will be:

An authentic woman who bears His image

One who is kind-hearted and confident, not passive or fragile

An influencer who leads without pretense or manipulation

A dreamer who runs toward her dreams without striving

Doing the work that helps us grow, yet living in contentment along the way

Intentionally making art with the life we've been given

Becoming wise and peaceful

Loving and gentle

Humble in heart

Grateful

Redeemed.

Welcome to *Redeemed*.

With love and gratefulness,

Angela Thomas-Pharr

www.angelathomaspharr.com

WHEN LOVE MAKES A PROMISE

PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS

I CAN'T

Hello, my friend.

Sometimes, when a person wants something to change, she'll think about it, talk about it, read about it, cry about it, and pray about it. They might journal about it. Download an app about it. Make a list about it. Go see a counselor about it. Sign up for a class about it. Put reminder notes on the mirror about it. Find an accountability group about it. Graph a chart about it. Beat themselves up about it.

And then one day, they just forget about it.

Until they think about it again. And the string is pulled that spins the crazy-maker top into circles all over again. Only the next time, it's always faster.

The Lord knows we have all tried to change some things about ourselves. We've tried to help other people change their lives. We've even jumped in to help change the world. A lot of us have tried and tried, with very little real change to show for all these circles. And now, most everybody I know is tired.

Maybe you know this. When you are tired and your spirit is heavy, the heart begins to mumble the saddest word: *Whatever*.

I may not know many things, but spinning in circles, weariness, and mumbling—I could teach a master class in those. You see, I have longed for spiritual and emotional maturity; to improve myself and my habits; to have greater discipline; for quick obedience when the Holy Spirit leads; to be a woman ever-increasing in wisdom, patience, and grace, who inwardly and outwardly is being changed and redeemed.

And the truth is God has moved powerfully in my life. But mercy, I could sit down and cry over all the times I abandoned His power, having taken two steps forward and then turned around to run half a mile back. Too many years have been wasted spinning in circles, going nowhere.

Maybe you know something about spinning in circles too. How would you fill in this blank?

I've given up trying _____.

See if you can relate to this:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

ROMANS 7:15,18b-19

Can I tell you how it humbles me to open my Bible and read those words? We rarely encounter that kind of vulnerability, and, yet, the apostle Paul recounted with such transparency his own inability to change. Then, in verse 24, we can feel the agony and downright hopelessness in his words.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

ROMANS 7:24

I don't know how you arrived at this study. I don't know anything about your life so far, but I imagine if the truth were told, somewhere inside, a part of you is asking, maybe even crying, "Who will deliver me?"

Who will deliver me from my pain? My regret? My habits? My choices? My secrets? My sin?

Who will deliver me from these crazy circles? And the wasted time? And the weariness? And the loneliness?

Who will deliver me from . . . whatever?

Okay, were some of those questions a little deeper than you were ready to go? Like, it's the first day of a new Bible study, and you were just gonna practice sitting down with all your stuff and warming up to the whole idea of whatever this *Redeemed* is going to be.

Honestly, I've been worried about jumping in too fast. I want you to know your heart is safe here in this study. You will never turn one of these pages and get a spiritual-shaming from me. I will never set you up to be emotionally manipulated.

I want to earn your trust, mainly because I want you to give these weeks more than just your time. I want you to go all in. Wholeheartedly and devoted. Not to me, but to God's truth. Maybe you're already feeling like you're here for a reason, even if you haven't had time to think about it yet. For all those reasons we don't yet know, the Holy Spirit would not let me dilly-dally with your heart today, put us on a slow train, or help you spin more circles going nowhere.

Here's is my goal for us: When you and I finish the last day of this book, not only will we know our Redeemer and His plan called redemption, we will be experiencing His very real and substantial redemption in our own lives. We will be redeemed. And our lives, character, relationships, and callings will continue being redeemed.

I didn't come to play. Not with God's truth, nor with your heart. So would you picture me standing beside you—with the truth of all my insecurities, struggles, and flaws—wholeheartedly and honestly asking, *Who will deliver us from ourselves? Who will stop us from staying the same? Who will keep us from becoming modern-day scoffers? I am complacent. And inconsistent. And unworthy. I am all things I don't want to be. Who will deliver me?*

The apostle Paul's soul released its desperate cry, "Who will deliver me?" and immediately, I mean, very-next-sentence immediately, his heart knew the answer.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

ROMANS 7:25

You are I are doing this study together because we both need to be delivered from ourselves. Even with our diversity of cultures and opinions, I bet we could agree on a couple of things. We both want to become the best possible version of who we were created to be. And we both want to live the best possible version of the life we've been given.

In A.D. 495, Augustine wrote that most people just want a happy life.¹ Nothing about the human spirit has changed. But here's the thing: The deep ruts I've made spinning circles serve no purpose except to prove that the life I long to live and the woman I long to become will not be created by my own hands. I can't. I can't make the life or the person I dream of being happen. I've tried. Lord knows I've tried. I desperately need someone to come and rescue me. I need someone to shape me, reshape me, lead me, walk with me, and take me the rest of the way home.

As I just typed those words, that old heavy feeling of discouragement wanted to come in and sit with me like it's done so many times before. But there was no room beside me today because, like Paul, I remembered the most glorious truth: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* We have a Redeemer, and we shall be redeemed.

PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS

GOD CAN

Would you open your Bible and start reading Romans 7:15 until the end of the chapter? Paul took a little inventory of his great need. Are you ready to start this thing strong? And vulnerable? And honest?

What about your great need? Finish this question for God with some of your own personal needs.

Who will deliver me from _____?

Wait! Don't close your Bible yet. Paul isn't finished with us. Find Romans 8:1, and fill in the blanks below,

There is therefore now _____
for _____ who are in Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:1

Do you see the beauty of what just happened? Romans 7 reads like someone shouting, "I can't!"

You have to believe the very minute Paul wrote those vulnerable words of confession, the heaviness of old despair wanted to hold him down and keep shaming him. But, bless God, Paul did not go down that day. He remembered, "Jesus Christ, our Lord, is my Deliverer! I belong to Jesus now. This struggle cannot keep shaming me. Jesus took my condemnation to the cross. And there is therefore now no condemnation for me."

No matter your struggles. No matter your failures. No matter how stinking awful your track record, if you belong to Jesus Christ, "there is therefore now no condemnation."

PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS

Sometimes we believe we can't because we never have. Maybe you've never had the time to be intentional about reading through an entire book of the Bible, thinking about what God is saying to you, and then spending consistent time in a conversation with Him, called prayer. It's okay if your first thought about all this is, *I can't*.

In today's study, as I began to confess, *I can't*, to God, it was like a flood-gate opened, and all my *I can't's* came pouring out. Where are you feeling the stress of *I can't* in your life today? Turn those into prayer. Let the gates of your heart swing open. God wants to come in.

Oh God, I can't . . .

If your life is like most, one of the first things you're feeling is, *I just can't do this study right now*. Here are some reasons you may feel like you can't continue:

- The timing is probably crummy.
- You are not physically or emotionally rested. Actually, you may find yourself smack dab in the middle of the most exhausting season of your life.
- You're in this alone. Not one friend has signed up to do this. No one in your family is on board. You just don't have any support.
- You're just not feeling it. Whatever "redeemed" is, it doesn't sound very exciting. You want to feel more excited.
- There are a lot of extra things going on in your life right now. And the kids, they're so busy.

Maybe I missed something, so help me out. List two more reasons why you can't commit to the next 40 days.

So there you go. My five, plus your two. You should have a pretty strong list of reasons to close the book. Now you have it all down in black and white: *you can't*.

Can I tell you something?

- The timing will never get better. Not when you finish school. Not when you're married. Not when the kids are grown. Not when you retire. Never.
- You could wait until you're rested, but how long has it been since that last happened?
- The people who truly love you may never be able to support you in the ways you long to be supported. How many more years will that keep you from beginning?

- Feeling excited about something is rarely a good measure of value. I would love for you to feel excited. I actually believe those feelings may show up in the weeks to come, but then again, maybe not.
- Everything in the world that can fall on your head to distract you has probably already started falling. If it's any consolation to you, everything is falling here too.

Here's why I'm walking us through all of this. I desperately want us to begin this study in truth—to take an honest inventory of our hearts; the very real, everyday lives we lead; and the condition of our souls. If God has planned to show up in your life with the power to redeem, the first thing I am expecting you to face is resistance. We are not wackado people, so rest assured, any resistance you face will be rational, logical stuff. There will be 100 good reasons for you not to make this commitment right now.

Let's press in a little further. Would you close your eyes for just a few minutes? As you do, will you think about one thing you know you cannot do? That's right. Something in your life you're giving up on. One thing you are sure you cannot do. We're not in a hurry, so don't skip this. Sit as long as you need, until you have it.

Do you need God? Are you ready to search for Him? And fight against resistance to get to Him? If it's possible to fall in love with God, do you want to really love Him? If a woman can be changed by His power, do you need to be changed? If God can be your friend, do you want Him to be yours? Are you ready to hear God say, *Oh baby girl, I know you can't. But I can.*

God can.

Earlier we said every one of us needs a deliverer. Like Paul in Romans 7, our weary souls shout to the world, *I CAN'T. I can't do the very thing I want to do. And try to do. And dream of doing.* What I want you to know today is that the God of glory knows your great need, and He has already left heaven to help you.

You.

God left heaven to save you, to heal you, and to redeem you. He knows your struggles, your vulnerabilities, and your pain. He sees how you keep spinning in circles, revisiting the same places, disappointing the same people, listening to the same lies. The old patterns. The insecurities. The stupid habits. The addictions. All the ways you keep proving you can't improve, and you can't get unstuck. He knows you cannot change yourself.

And that has always been the point. You can't.

But God can.

You and I are not the first people to declare, *I can't*. Long before us, there was a Red Sea and the walls of Jericho and a lion's den and a stone rolled in front of a grave. And the people who needed God surely cried to heaven, *I can't*.

Here is the sweet mercy: The God of heaven hears when we cry, *I can't*. And even more amazing to me, He answers. The Bible says the love and mercy of God toward us never changes, so that when a desperate woman calls to Him, God stoops to her, moves closer to her, and answers her.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, "Here I am."

ISAIAH 58:9

Every time we say, *I can't*, the Bible has already declared, *God can*.

I believe God wants to begin responding to you this very day. We're not waiting until Week 5 to get closer to Him. Do you need God today? Then tell Him. Really take the time to tell Him. Bow your head now, or write your prayer out, but go ahead and tell Him that you need Him.

*Maybe you long to finally believe God is real. Tell Him.
Maybe you want to feel His presence with you. Ask Him.
Maybe you want a better relationship with Him. Say that.*

Being redeemed is about being changed. No one can be redeemed in their own strength or by their own actions. If we are going to live as redeemed women with lives that keep being redeemed, there is only one answer. Each one of us needs a Redeemer.

We can't. Oh mercy, we really and truly can't. But hallelujah and praise be to God, He is our Redeemer, and He can.

Why does God want you to know He can be your Redeemer? Because He loves you.

He. Loves. You.

How close is God to you right now? Here's what the Bible says:

The LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

JOSHUA 1:9

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

PSALM 23:4

The LORD is near to all who call on him.

PSALM 145:18

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17

Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:20b

He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

HEBREWS 13:5

The theology of God's love and redemption is a really big deal, and I can't wait for us to know more about it. But for today, here's where we need to land:

When MY GREAT NEED accepts GOD'S GREAT LOVE, **REDEMPTION BEGINS.**
I CAN'T. HE CAN.

God did not design us to spin in circles, staying the same, only more frustrated and discouraged with every passing year. We were made to grow and change. God's power to redeem—and keep redeeming—our lives is the means by which we are meant to grow and mature. You can try to dig down to find your bootstraps all you want, but God has so much more in mind for you and me.

Are you ready for God to do greater things in your life? Are you ready for redemption? Will you make a wholehearted commitment to our next 40 days together?

PREPARING FOR 40 DAYS

Tomorrow we begin our 40 days of intentional time with God. If that sounds a little intimidating, let me put your mind at ease: There aren't any hard-and-fast rules about this. We all just need a little nudge sometimes. In the next 40 days, I'm hoping some of us begin spending consistent time with God, some recover the intimacy we used to have, and all of us find our time with the Lord sweeter than we've ever known.

Here's the goal: We're gonna read through the Book of Psalms and pray for the next 40 days. In a row. Even when you don't feel like it. And yes, I'm thankful to report, there is grace for puny, whiny-baby praying.

Here's what I'm expecting when we're through: you will never want to be away from God's Word or time with Him in prayer again.

DAY 1

DAY 1

BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Welcome to our first day of prayer. Day 1. Launch day. Go day. We're rollin' day.

One of these days is finally today.

I've been so excited about adding 40 days of prayer to this Bible study, I could burst. And then, at the very same time, I've been kind of nervous. Nervous because, *What if I'm wrong about adding this? What if people don't want to pray for 40 days? What if doing a Bible study and praying for 40 days is too confusing? Or too much? Or too hard? What if this becomes the smallest attended Bible study ever?* You know, I'm just over here in my house trying to go where God leads. I haven't taken a poll or anything. Actually, I haven't even asked anybody if they think I should add 40 days of prayer. I'm afraid they'll smile politely. So, with zero guarantees, I'm just going for it. We're praying for 40 days. Boom.

That declaration just sent me to my knees.

And it forces me to trust the Holy Spirit. You see, I can jump up and down, type in ALL CAPS, make teaching videos, post personal messages, write blog posts, and engage social media until we're all sick of me, but I cannot make one person engage her heart. I am forced to trust God because I can't get in my car and come over there and make you pray. I'm not assured anything I say or write in these pages will move your heart toward prayer. Maybe you signed up to watch some videos and fill in some blanks in this book, but this prayer thing? You're not sure. It might be too much to ask.

Here's why this matters so much.

A Bible study about being redeemed is awesome! We are going to learn some stuff! Big stuff! Smart, Bible-girl stuff! But here's what grabbed a hold of my heart and won't let go. What if this happens? What if you are doing the *Redeemed* study, and your life starts *being redeemed*?

Boom.

40 DAYS OF PRAYER
STARTS NOW!

The power of prayer has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see mighty wonders of Divine grace and power wrought, in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let the whole church answer God's standing challenge "Call to Me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great and mighty things which though knowest not" (Jer. 33:3).²
J. HUDSON TAYLOR

I can't do that. You already know you can't do that. But God can. As a matter of fact, He's been waiting for you to be here.

Prayer puts us in the presence of God. Entering into a conversation with God. Listening to God. Responding to God. Prayer is the link between having head knowledge about God and the soul that experiences the reality of God. In this study, prayer will be the difference-maker for all of us. The next 40 days will either be the time we learned some more "stuff" about God, or they will be the days we personally experienced the presence and power of God in our very souls.

I want us to get everything we can get while we're here. And if God allows, these days will only be the beginning for all of us. I can't make you pray, so I'm just praying that you'll pray. I'm inviting you to pray, but mostly, I'm trusting God, the only One with the power to persuade you.

BEING REDEEMED

What in the world does *being redeemed* mean? *Redeemed* is one powerful word, but *being redeemed* is not just one thing in the Bible. There's a lot more explaining to do, but for the sake of beginning with the basic Bible truth, being redeemed involves three distinct parts of the Christian life:

The moment you believe Jesus died to save you,
You are redeemed.
As you live the rest of your life growing as a follower of Christ,
You are being redeemed.
When you die and go to heaven,
You will be fully and finally redeemed.

A lot of theology and some technical words are involved, but ultimately, *being redeemed* is about *being changed*. When you first believe in Jesus, also known as the day of your **salvation**, *you are redeemed*. On that day, the Bible says your standing with God is immediately changed, you are given a new identity, and the Holy Spirit comes to live in your soul. A Christ-follower (a Christian) is changed from death to life, dark to light, lost to found. You go from a stranger to God—to a daughter of the Most High King.

Based on what you already know, list some of the immediate things that change when someone places his or her faith in Jesus.

From the day of believing until we arrive in heaven, you and I live the Christian life with a new ambition—to be conformed to the image of Christ. The process of the old woman I have been, being changed into the likeness of Christ, is the ongoing work of *being redeemed*. This process is also known in the Bible as **sanctification**.

For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.
ROMANS 8:29 (HCSB)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

How have you seen someone being changed as they continued to follow Jesus? (Maybe that person was you.) List a few examples.

And then one day, hallelujah, the journey to heaven will be over. Upon a believer's death, she is immediately taken into the presence of God, where she is *finally and fully redeemed*. That means being fully remade into the image of Christ. Fully in the presence of the Lord. This eternal change is called **glorification**.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

There are three unique phases in our redemption, and each phase of being redeemed involves being changed:

SALVATION: We are *changed* from unbeliever to believer.

SANCTIFICATION: We continue *being changed* into the image of Christ.

GLORIFICATION: We are *eternally changed* into the likeness of Christ.

Since you are still reading these words on earth, at this very moment, you can only be one of two places. On your life time line, you are either pre-salvation or post-salvation. Either you do not believe in Jesus or you believe. You are either unredeemed or redeemed. And in case you are wondering, God never uses vague words like *sorta* or *kind of* to describe our position before Him. The redeemed have made a certain decision; the unredeemed have not.

This Bible study is about two things:

- 1. **MAKING A REDEEMED DECISION**—being changed into a follower of Jesus Christ.
- 2. **MAKING A REDEEMED JOURNEY**—being changed into His image.

It's about becoming *the* redeemed, who are being redeemed constantly. And both of these things require you to choose. God will provide the power for both, but the choice is always and only yours. In just the same way, prayer is how we connect our lives to God's power, but praying is also your choice. You can choose not to. But I'm praying something specific is stirring inside of you right this moment, a flicker of hope in your soul. Will you give hope 40 days? 40 real, honest days? Will you commit to 40 days of prayer? Let's mark it down with the dates and your signed pledge:

Today, _____, I am beginning 40 days of
prayer. The date of the 40th day will be: _____.

I long to be redeemed.

Sincerely committed, _____

READ AND MEDITATE

Today, we'll begin reading and meditating through the Book of Psalms. In the back of this book, you can check out "40 Days: The Psalms, Meditation, and Prayer" on page 188.

As you turn from today's study toward a time in prayer, read the first two chapters in the Book of Psalms and spend a few moments meditating on the words God is using to speak to you today.

TODAY'S READING: PSALMS 1–2

MY DAY 1 PRAYER FOR YOU

Oh Father, our God and our Redeemer, may Your presence fill the place where my friend sits with Your Word. Give her a fresh, new awareness of You. Give her the gift of knowing and believing You are near. Cover her with Your grace. Convince her that she is loved and welcomed into Your presence. In Jesus' precious name, amen.

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Here we go . . . praying for 40 days together.

Some words to help you begin:

- *Father, You are . . .*
- *Father, forgive me . . .*
- *Father, redeem me . . .*
- *Father, be near to me . . .*
- *Father, be glorified in me . . .*

DAY 2

BEGINNING WITH A WORD

So, this is how this whole thing started.

One morning I said to my husband, Scott, “I have no idea when I’m supposed to write the next Bible study, but I think God spoke the title to me in my sleep.” Here’s the part where you should know that I rarely dream. Lots of people seem to have very detailed dreams, but not me. I’m one of those go-to-sleep-and-wake-up kind of people. You can imagine the she’s-never-said-that-before look in Scott’s eyes when he asked, “What’s the title?”

“Redeemed,” is all I said—because it’s all I knew.

Redeemed: points to something that has been recovered by paying a sum to get it back.³

Well, right then, my big lug of a hunky husband started crying. Then I started crying. And somehow, through all those choked up tears, Scott forced two words,

“That’s it,” he said through his tears.

This project began the morning God whispered, *Redeemed*. And ever since then, I’ve been trying to pay attention. Looking, reading, searching, listening, asking, seeking. My first inclination was to reach for the deep theologians with their weighty thoughts and academic words, so I did. I jumped into the study of redemption like it was the first day of summer, and I was the neighborhood kid sprinting all the way to the pool for a running-jump cannonball into the deep end. So. very. excited.

I guess I spent six months or more in a full-fledged redemption theology geek-out. I loved studying so much, I considered going back to seminary to get my doctorate or traveling to international libraries to find better, geekier books. The deeper I dove, the more there was to find. Complex theologies with intricate biblical patterns, all woven together with fine threads of differing perspective, opinion, and insight. Honestly, I loved all of my time down there in the deep end, swimming around on the bottom, discovering new thought trinkets to handle and examine.

But there is one very important thing to remember about being in over your head at the deep end of the pool. There is no air down there. Nada. And no air means no life. Maybe you know what I mean.

Have you ever felt in over your head with God? Maybe you try to pay attention at church, but the teaching doesn’t connect with your head, much less your heart. Do parts of the Bible ever feel like thick patches of God-fog to you? You want to seek God. You want to know Him. But you can’t ever seem to find your way.

Take a minute and jot down some of the ways you have felt in over your spiritual head in the past. Understanding the Bible? Theology? Other religions? Be as specific as you can.

How would you describe knowing God right now? Is it:

- He’s becoming more clear. I’m learning to trust Him and see where God wants me to go!*
- I’m in a God-fog. I truly want a real relationship, but I can’t seem to find my way.*
- I have no idea what you’re talking about. Is this a Bible study? I thought I signed up for a book club.*

While we’re taking a look inside, what about your soul today?

- Filled with meaning and purpose for my life.*
- Being healed.*
- Wounded. Hurting. Lonely.*
- Empty and bored, or empty and distressed.*

Do you remember yesterday’s lesson? You and I begin a relationship with God when we are redeemed. As we continue being redeemed, the relationship grows deeper and sweeter as we are being changed into the likeness of Christ.

Your relationship with God is not meant to be a scary dive into murky waters, but a real, thriving, everyday relationship. Being redeemed helps us live a better life with meaning and purpose! God’s grace removes our shame. He meets us right where we are. And His love can remove our fear.

Our earth assignment is to keep being redeemed. Yep, our everyday life, in this crazy world, during these crazy days.

Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and my self is the earth’s shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon . . . what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know You God because I am in the way.⁴
FLANNERY O’CONNOR

And, as you well know, in the real world, somebody's gotta climb out of the deep end of the pool and make dinner, pay the bills, and mow the lawn. That's you and me—and all those who choose to follow Jesus Christ.

In the weeks ahead, we may do a few cannonballs into deeper theology from time to time, but I want you to know we're going to keep our heads above water. We're going to breathe the fresh air of God's truth and grace. Being redeemed is one of the most important concepts in the Bible, and these weeks are going to make a real difference in your life.

We're going to be redeemed.

If you've ever helped a child with algebra, you might remember that solving an equation begins by reducing the equation to its simplest form. One of God's sweet gifts of grace is that big, complex theology, like being redeemed, becomes even more glorious when reduced to its simplest form. My apologetics professor taught us to approach the Bible like this.⁵

The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.

The un-plain things and the un-main things may be interesting, but the most important things in the Bible are the plain, main things. Hallelujah and amen. So, with that clear guide in mind, if we could choose one word to communicate the message of the entire Bible, then that plain, main word might be:

If you prefer theological cannonballs over slow-wading, read *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, by John Murray, Scottish professor of systematic theology.

Redeemed.

Or, we could also choose an equally wonderful plain, main word like:

Loved.

And, if we had to choose only one verse to represent the whole Bible, that plain, main verse might be:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

JOHN 3:16

Circle the verbs in the previous verse. Now use those verbs to help you list three main, plain truths the verse teaches us.

1.

2.

3.

Now, write your name in all the blanks below. This is what it means for you to be redeemed:

For God so loved _____, that he gave his only Son, that if _____ believes in him _____ will not perish but _____ will have eternal life.

JOHN 3:16

Here is a plain, main truth from the Bible: You are loved by God. So very, very loved. Because God loves you, He wants to help you, and He doesn't want to wait for some far away time to become part of your life. He sent His Son long ago because He wants to help you today.

READ AND MEDITATE

TODAY'S READING: PSALMS 3–4

MY DAY 2 PRAYER FOR YOU

O Father, You are glorious, and Your Word is truly our help and our path. Will You give us two things today—the sweet clarity that comes from simple truth and the deep hunger to know You more? Lord, will You continue to make Your presence known in the places where we pray. Father, hear our stumbles and mumbles. Help us know how to begin. Welcome each one into Your presence with a joy that floods her heart with grace. In the name of Jesus, amen and amen.

RESPOND IN PRAYER

[He] prayed continually to God.
ACTS 10:2

Horizontal lines for writing a prayer response.

As an instinct, prayer is a response to our innate but fragmentary knowledge of God . . . As a gift of the Spirit, however, prayer becomes the continuation of a conversation God has started. If that conversation proceeds, as in the best conversations, praying becomes meeting with God— heaven in the ordinary.⁶
TIMOTHY KELLER

DAY 3

BEGINNING WITH A PROMISE

My mind cannot comprehend the great time line of eternity, but the Bible tells us, from eternity past, long before we ever were, God already loved each one of us with a perfect and unwavering love.

I have loved you with an everlasting love.
JEREMIAH 31:3b

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.
EPHESIANS 1:4

The Bible declares you and I, and all human beings, were created from God’s love, for His love, to enjoy His love.

We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love.
1 JOHN 4:16

In your Bible, turn to the Book of Genesis. As you read verses 1-25 of the first chapter, they unfold with ever-increasing brilliance, outlining the order of God’s perfect creation. Beginning in verse 11 and continuing through verse 25, God used a specific phrase to define the way He created those groups. Find that phrase and fill in the word below:

God created each . . . according to their/its _____.

Vegetation, trees, creatures, livestock. Over and over, God is exacting when He says every living thing made so far was made according to their *kind*. And now, we arrive at the pinnacle of creation.

From verse 26, fill in the blanks below:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our _____, after our _____.”

And verse 27:

So God _____ man in _____ own
_____, in the image of God he created _____;
male and _____ he created _____.

Being made in the image of God means:

Do you see what just happened? Unlike all the previous creation, God created man in His own image.

• Man is like God.

Every single human being—no matter his or her race, age, disability, weakness or sin—equally bears the status of being in God’s image.

• Man represents God.

How should we value and respect the image-bearing of all human beings?

With our conduct:

By giving honor:

By providing protection:

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

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed all the gifts of the perfect creation:

1. They ruled and subdued the earth (1:28).
2. They were made perfectly for one another (2:18-23).
3. They enjoyed a perfect relationship with one another and with God (2:25).
4. They were blessed by God (1:28).
5. They were morally perfect like the image of God and given the free will to reason and choose (1:27).

In this first scene of humanity, there was only perfect creation and perfect relationship in the garden of Eden. Nothing needed to be redeemed. Nothing was lost nor needed to be found. Nothing was enslaved nor needed to be set free.

But even from eternity past, God knew His beloved creation would choose to disobey Him. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose one willful act of disobedience. With their choice, came consequences. Look at Genesis 3:23-24, some of the saddest verses in the Bible.⁷

Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

GENESIS 3:23-24

The NIV Bible translation says God “banished” them from the garden. Then, to assure their permanent exile, He stationed a cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the entrance to the garden. Adam and Eve’s perfect relationship with God was forever changed. Can you picture this sad Scene Two? Adam and Eve are walking away from the only life they’ve ever known—perfection. The garden and its beauty is behind them. A cherubim wielding a flaming sword is on guard. Only the desolate, cursed land is in front of them.

The day of Adam and Eve’s disobedience is known as “the fall” because all creation fell from the grace of God. Adam was the divinely-appointed representative of the human race, and when Adam chose disobedience, the entire human race fell with him. All of creation, including humanity, suffered the consequences of the fall:

- Man was separated from the presence of God and could only experience Him from a distance.
- Life without pain or death was lost and the certainty of pain and death came to all creation.
- Man’s innocent nature in the garden was replaced by a sinful nature, walking among evil and darkness.
- Perfect relationship turned to shame. Nothing would ever be the same.

Why would a perfect God create a being that may not choose to love Him?

God is love. He is both the true reality and the true feeling of love. He did not create us like puppets to be pulled by strings. Being forced to love anyone is no love at all. God created humans with the ability to choose or to reject His love, so that He would be glorified by real love.

One trespass led to condemnation for all men . . . by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.

ROMANS 5:18-19a

Adam's sin became our inherited sin nature. This very day, I know for sure I inherited the sin of Adam. When I was a little girl, even before I understood anything spiritual, my nature had already led me to choose sin. And hide my sin. And sin again. I imagine you also know this struggle well. We were all born with sinful natures. Like Paul in Romans 7, we know the battle inside us is real.

Let's go back to Genesis 3, because there is one more thing you must see. In verses 14-15, God pronounced a curse and a final judgment for the devil. I've tried to give some explanations here:

Because you (the devil) have done this, cursed are you . . . I (God) will put enmity (hostility) between you (the devil) and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he (Jesus, one of Eve's offspring) shall bruise your head (destroy the devil with a mortal blow), and you (the devil) shall bruise his heel (will deliver painful and vexing wounds, but they are not mortal).

GENESIS 3:14-15 (EXPLANATIONS ADDED)

In Genesis 3:15, God promises to undo all that Satan has brought about. He promises a victorious Redeemer.

And don't miss this. God gave that promise to His beloved, disobedient creation *before* they were banished from the garden. My pastor has made this beautiful proclamation:

On Adam and Eve's worst day, our God of hope promised His best day!⁸

The love of God has always been greater than everything. And God's love does not change. Long before we were born, God's love already knew we could not change our nature, break the chains of our sin, or get back into His presence on our own.

So Love made a promise. Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, is Love's promise kept.

READ AND MEDITATE

TODAY'S READING: PSALMS 5-6

MY DAY 3 PRAYER FOR YOU

O Father, You promised a Redeemer for this fallen world, and You kept Your promise in Jesus Christ. God, we bless You and thank You and rejoice in Your unfailing love. Take the truth of Your promise kept deep into our souls. You have seen our sin, and long before we knew, You promised a way to forgiveness, a way to restoration, a way to be redeemed. Move powerfully in our hearts. Open our eyes. Give new life to our prayers. Stir our souls awake. For Jesus' name, amen and amen.

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!

PSALM 107:1

DAY 4

READ, MEDITATE, & PRAY

I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.
ISAIAH 41:14

READ AND MEDITATE

TODAY'S READING: PSALMS 7-9

MY DAY 4 PRAYER FOR YOU

Father, we feel our great need and the struggle inside. God, please be loud with Your love to every heart today. We need a Redeemer, and You have promised to redeem. Help us turn loose of every old way of coping and the broken ways we manage our pain. God, let us fall headlong into Your grace and declare with new faith that all of our hope is in You. We need You, Lord. Come quickly, sweet Redeemer. In Jesus' name, amen.

RESPOND IN PRAYER

He has granted to us his precious and very great promises,
so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.
2 PETER 1:4

DAY 5

READ, MEDITATE, & PRAY

God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
GALATIANS 4:4b-5

READ AND MEDITATE

TODAY'S READING: PSALMS 10-12

MY DAY 5 PRAYER FOR YOU

Father, will You keep making these truths personal to us—not some far off theology, but hope for our pain right now. We cannot save ourselves, but You have declared from Your glory, “I can.” Lord, speak right now, maybe in ways we’ve never heard. Lord, do whatever it takes to crack any hard shell of indifference. Come into our chaotic lives with Your love. Get our full attention, Lord. Make Yourself known. Be a safe place today. Send the Holy Spirit to help us ask You, “Lord, come and be my Redeemer.” Oh sweet Jesus, be my Redeemer, amen.

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Draw near to my soul, redeem me.
PSALM 69:18

SESSION 2: VIEWER GUIDE

REDEEMED FOR A LIFE WITH GOD

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

PSALM 103:1-5

David writes this psalm in celebration of the _____ of
our _____.

The first _____ of the Lord is that He forgives all of
your _____.

None of the benefits of the _____ come until you've been
_____ of your sin.

The consequences of Adam and Eve's sin were _____ and a _____
_____ attached to all of humanity.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.

GENESIS 3:15

To be redeemed means to be _____ into _____
with God.

God promises to _____ us with His _____.

WHEN
LOVE
NEVER
FAILS