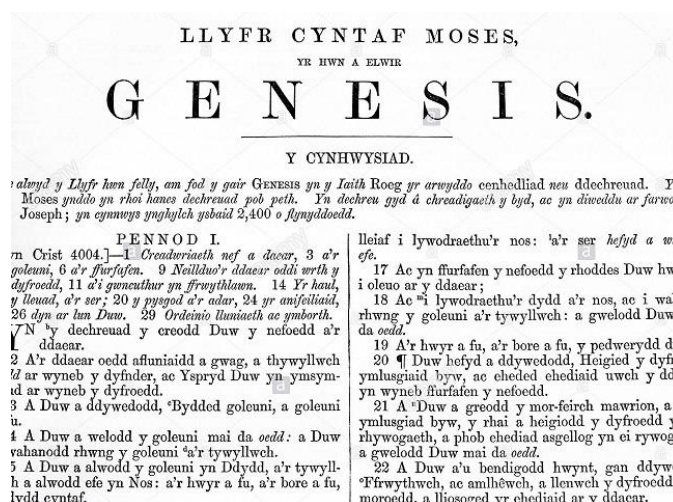


# Life Lessons from Genesis

## Volume 1: Chapters 1-11



(Image from the Christian Welsh Bible)

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Restoration Movement Literature

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## Personal Introduction

Greetings, friend. This is my first book specifically written with young people in mind – teens through young adults – this is for you.

This book is first and foremost a practical one regarding Genesis. As I have studied and taught on Genesis many times now, the many practical lessons of the book have been jumping out at me and I have found them very useful personally, in evangelism, and in teaching.

As I have shared these lessons, there seems to be enthusiasm for this kind of material (especially among young people), so it was only fitting that I would try to put as much as I could on paper.

So, while my other works on Genesis are intended to be in-depth and helpful commentaries, this book is meant to be more like a self-help book where we let Genesis teach us how to live. And boy are there some lessons. Just wait and see!

The life lessons from the book are also deliberately derived from the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis because these are often seen as “mythical” in nature. I believe the power of these stories, and their accompanying lesson, is a strong apologetic against that charge. Could these stories have the power and accuracy they do if they were merely made up?

This book primarily attempts to honor Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:6 to learn from our Biblical ancestors, as these stories have been told to us specifically so that we will learn from them. We are to learn not only the stories and the lessons, but to imitate the good of the characters themselves. It is acting out this drama properly that we will focus on.

Also, it is my hope to do five volumes – covering all of Genesis’ life lessons. This first volume I dedicate to the God who made the heavens and the earth, my wife who is my heaven on earth, and my kids, who continually remind this author of his need to be humble and kind.

## Acknowledgements

This book has been a departure from my usual style and therefore has been unusually difficult to write. To finish it, there were some people who endured many conversations and even arguments to help me wrap my head around some of these concepts. These people are the following:

George L. Faull, of whom I am convinced knows more about the Bible book of Genesis more than anyone else alive, and Summit Theological Seminary and all its faculty and staff, who are my spiritual oasis.

Kara, my wife, who daily listens to my musings and pays attention enough to respond helpfully. She is the most patient person I have ever known.

Chris Knapp, who is always thinking, and can tear apart anything I have to say instantaneously and yet do so kindly and constructively. My neighbor, dear friend, and accountability partner, thank you.

My kids, who never get to listen to the radio in the car like a normal family but are always having to listen to something I'm monologuing about.

Callao Christian Church and its leadership, who support, encourage, and subsidize the imperfect writings of this imperfect man.

My printing and binding team who selflessly and silently always have material ready when it is needed.

My critics, without whom I would fail the test of Luke 6:26.

## Disclaimer

The Bible warns against diving too far into speculative thought (1 Timothy 1:4; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). Being aware of this fact, I will state up front that this book contains some speculation and "educated guesswork." When this is the case, every effort has been made to point out this fact. If any reader feels I have wandered into pure speculation without stating so, please contact me. I will edit the next run. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1

“You must understand the power of speech”

The book of Genesis begins with two births<sup>1</sup> (the universe, mankind) and ends with two funerals (Jacob, Joseph). And in between, there many more of both. Of course, this is still true today, the cycle of life and death.

Many nihilistic authors past and present see this cycle as futile to address: What is the point if we are all going to die? What is the point if I did not get to choose when and where I would be born? What is the point if I do not know when I will die?

And here is the thing – they are right – if God is left out of the picture.<sup>2</sup>

Genesis 1 stands in stark contrast to any other worldview, but especially any worldview that leaves out God. Genesis 1:1 is a non-starter if God is left out, and therefore so are the most precious truths about mankind: his origin, his nature, his being, his purpose, and his hope beyond death.

Also, the power of man’s (yours) speech:

An unknown author one time said, “Rome built the world’s greatest empire but now it lies in ruins; the Jews wrote a book, and it’s still here.”

In this chapter, it is my hope to give you, dear reader, an awe for the power of [your] speech – for both good and evil. I do not believe that the power of words can be underestimated. Speech is a misunderstood phenomenon and very unappreciated in our time.

Of all potential mediums, God chose to use “foolish preaching” to share the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21); in other words, God chose words to deliver the only means by which a man can be saved from damnation<sup>3</sup> forever.

In the very beginning of Genesis, God will literally speak all things into existence. Then, towards the end of the chapter, starting in verse 26, God make us in the same way but with a special (unique) characteristic – we would be made in the image of God. This special making would also give us the

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<sup>1</sup> I am waxing poetic here. Adam and Eve were not birthed but created. The language is only for the illustration.

<sup>2</sup> Check out the last chapter of this book to understand what unbelief really is and its devastating dangers.

<sup>3</sup> This is the proper use of this word. This is both its original meaning and emphasis in the English language.

unique gift of speech patterned after His, obviously part of this divine image, as no other creation of God speaks as He does here or afterwards.

So, there is something here to really “unpack” – the idea that God made the universe with words – and then made us like him also with that gift of speech.

And since, man has been “creating” ideas that have changed the world – for better or worse – with speech. This is still true today. You do it everyday too.

It is not within the scope of this book to comprehensively look at all the Bible verses concerning speech, but it is one of the biggest subjects in all of Scripture. Speech creates worlds here. Faith comes by speech in the New Testament (Romans 10:17). There is truly no exhausting the importance of what you say, how you say it, to whom you say it, and why, because your speech has within it divine origin, divine essence, and therefore divine affect.

I want you to consider that you have never said anything insignificant; it is not possible. You may have said silly things, or flippant things, or crude things, but never anything insignificant. A creature like you who reflects God Himself is incapable of insignificance. Has God ever said or did anything insignificant? Never. Then it seems impossible you could possess His image, His unique gift of speech, with His power to build up or tear down with your mere words, and it also be simultaneously insignificant. Methinks we need a serious reconsideration of the importance of every word we say (Matthew 12:37), as all of them – including the careless ones – will be judged.

Think about it – the speech you regret the most, the speech that got you in the most trouble – was probably the speech you cared least about in the moment. It was the flippant words, the lack of concern in your speech, that caused the most harm. For if you had taken your speech seriously, what are the chances you would have said what you said? If you had thought ahead, would have said what you said? It is not likely. So, see even flippant speech is significant. We cannot escape this.

At the same time, your speech has the incredible power to do far more good than you ever knew. It is easy to think our voice is lost among the billions

of other voices, or that somehow, we are incapable of saying anything that mattered. On the contrary, the opposite is logically impossible – with the image of God in your being and speech – everything you say matters. And if you walked around with that thought every day, just imagine how much that would change your speech, and for the better!

Speech is the very adoption of responsibility and therefore meaning: since you cannot speak words without affect, then by nature you bear responsibility for your words and their effects. This truth brings serious meaning to your words, but also a necessary burden, yet one worth always carrying. It is in fact the carrying of meaningful burdens, like the divine responsibility of proper speech, that the meaning of life is both had and articulated.

This preacher personally believes that proper speech, paying attention (i.e. attentively listening/learning always), and courage are the three most important characteristics for daily life. But of these three, speech is tops.

In John 1:1ff, we are given additional revelation that God the Father used Jesus the Son to bring creation into being. This is a very interesting idea, as we are not only made in the image of God but told to imitate Christ specifically. If we were to imitate Christ in this sense, what might that look like?

A speculation that I continually think has some utility is that perhaps by imitating Christ in creation via proper speech we too can bring into being good things. Just like God used His Son to bring good things by speech, so He too can use us to do the same. What are some examples of how our speech can bring good things into being?

Books outlive empires. Write<sup>4</sup>. At the very least, your children and grandchildren will thank you.

Wives, your man runs on your genuine encouragement. On the encouragement of their wives alone, men have built civilizations. Without it, they are basically paralyzed. Withhold it to your own detriment.

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<sup>4</sup> If you want to learn how to think well, write. Writing and thinking are the same thing, only that writing forces you to make sense of your thoughts. Be prepared for some humble revelations but also some great ones!

Husbands, your wife needs you to pay attention to her – really, genuinely, pay attention to her. Listen and genuinely conversate. Withhold this to your own detriment.

Gossip is a world-sized wrecking ball. If you want to be single-handedly responsible for destroying lives and answer for it on judgment day, gossip. What is gossip?<sup>5</sup> When you say anything negative about anybody else, even if it is true.<sup>5</sup>

The spoken Gospel is a world-wide phenomenon. It is a message that has spread far and wide that has resonated like none other. This is no coincidence.

The first time I realized this phenomenon about speech in Scripture it shut me up for a bit. When you realize the power of your words, suddenly you take what you are about to say next more seriously. This is good in every way. Speech that is valued up front, thought through, concise, and wise is the most powerful single force in the universe. God’s speech proves this point – His speech alone caused the universe to exist. And His spoken Gospel alone saves souls.

So it is also with us – our speech continues to shape the course of our lives and all others who come into contact with it. Make it count.

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<sup>5</sup> Let’s play a quick game of the mind – imagine if everybody everywhere had to empty out the real “skeletons in their closet” for the entire world to see, including you. Is this a game you want to play? What would be result? Everybody would just hate each other. How about we not do this! Is it any wonder that Jesus said that he without sin throw the first stone? Seriously unpack that idea for the rest of your life; do not gossip.



## CHAPTERS 2-3

### “The Odd Couple: Marriage and Tragedy”

People get married for all kinds of reasons today. Most of those reasons are seriously wrong and hence why divorce and the destruction of families is so common.

The purpose of marriage needs a massive reset in our culture. It is the first subject about human relationships that God covers in Scripture; this is no coincidence<sup>6</sup>. What does He say about it?

Genesis 2:24 reads, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh.”

Anybody even considering marriage needs to unpack this verse word for word, phrase by phrase, for a long time, because anybody who doesn't, gets wrecked in their marriage instead of blessed.

This verse covers the realm of the role of a man and woman, the families of each, what this man and woman should do, and what they should become (and what that means) - all in one verse!

Do you see now what makes some men and women study Scripture so intently their whole lives? Every sentence is a divine bomb, full of relevant, earth-shaking truth. Every time you spend serious time studying the Scriptures you will walk away with your mind blown and your life changed. When you finally take Scripture seriously as the Word of God, and live it out, your life will take a trajectory you were not expecting. The entire course of history has many times been changed because a person studied the Word of God and took it seriously.

But back to marriage - what is its primary purpose? To make one flesh out of two, to literally create from nothing a family where there was none. That is why Genesis 2:24 begins with, “For this reason...”

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<sup>6</sup> You are going to see the phrase, “this is no coincidence” many times in this book. This is on purpose. The things God tells us in His word are no coincidence! They are not optional! This is the stuff of life! Ignore it at your own peril!

Why is this primarily important? Because tragedy is coming and the best buttress against it is a strong family in the Lord.

The very next verse after Genesis 2:24 is the fall of man. The very next verse! I commonly provide pre-marital counseling and recently I have begun to include this point: it is not a matter of if tragedy is coming, but when. The only choice you have is whether you will be ready. If your marriage is like the cricket who fiddled all summer long while the squirrels gathered nuts in preparation for winter, when tragedy comes, you will be left out in the cold.<sup>7</sup>

What does this look like? A marriage that fiddles during the summer is the one where the couple still largely does what they did before marriage: he has his hobbies, she has hers, they don't read or study together, they don't go to church, they don't learn new skills or possibly even sock money away. Instead, tragedy comes, and they are completely unprepared. One spouse blames the other (just like Adam does in Genesis 3:12), and before long, the marriage is ripped asunder. The marriage's foundations, already shaky and unsteady, crumble before the tragedy. Both walk away frustrated the other person didn't do more. Repeat ad nauseum.

Let me put it another way: Later in this book we will study Genesis 6, the story of Noah's flood. One specific verse in the New Testament about the flood has always stood out to me - "People were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, until the day the floods came."<sup>8</sup>

So, your flood IS coming, and you will NOT see it coming. One day, amidst normal life, suddenly the flood waters gush in. You cannot choose the flood, when it arrives, or mostly how it will play out. All you can is build your boat. What are you doing to build your ark?

Most couples have no plan for tragedy and therefore no ability to deal with it when it comes, which it inevitably will. If you want a marriage to stand the test of time, if you want your family to stick together through thick and thin, then you must have a plan for tragedy and an acceptance of the fact - accepting

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<sup>7</sup> In the original telling of the story, the squirrel dies. As do marriages, all the time.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 24:38

your suffering voluntarily, “taking up your cross”<sup>9</sup> – is a foundational part of maturity.

So how can a couple prepare for tragedy? I have an answer far more important than money, although saving up money for emergencies/tragedies is a must: you must build the bond and trust in your marriage (and kids, if they are part of the picture) to the point where you know – no matter what happens – you can and will rebuild together after tragedy<sup>10</sup>. This is more than a choice or simply saying you will do this! This is doing what it takes not only to believe this will happen, but that it would happen naturally because of your family’s preparedness in the event of tragedy:

This involves both of you growing personally and professionally on a consistent basis. This involves learning together. This involves going to church together. This involves volunteering together. This involves shedding the things in both of your lives that take away from any of the above (if you are doing the above, you will quickly find you do not miss those old habits). This involves climbing any available ladders of success together. This involves regular, planned communication. This involves mutual goals for the near, medium, and far futures. This involves putting God at the center and above your relationship, you both consistently living up to His expectations, being accountable to His Word.

If you do not want to do the above, don’t get married, because if you do get married without a similar commitment, you will be unmarried again after tragedy comes. Count on it.

Marriage is not two single people living together, occasionally having sex. It’s a whole new way of life and therefore most marriages fail because they do not treat it that way. It is sacrificial, difficult, and requires a great deal of effort. So why would people do it?

Because it’s meaningful beyond comprehension. Because it far exceeds the fleeting happiness of a television show or video game. Because it’s rare and truly special. Because it’s the foundation for a whole family of people to be

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

<sup>10</sup> I can personally say from experience that I have this kind of marriage and I wouldn’t trade it for all the money in the world, so money isn’t it.

functional in a dysfunctional world, to succeed where few do, to help where few can.

Marriage is not for the faint of heart, but it is for those who truly want to know how much their heart can love and the incalculable rewards that come with that. Because when you can love in tragedy, and your marriage is this impenetrable wall that all the forces of evil combined cannot penetrate, then you are a force for good in this world that will obliterate darkness and spread light as far as your family can reach. And that's a supernatural kind of fun.

And it feels good, solidly good. It feels better than any physical sensation, any circumstantial happiness, anything else. When you can weather tragedy like ancient rocks in the sea, when your ark is ready for the next flood, when your marriage even starts looking forward to the next challenge, then tell me, who can stand against you? And it's all because of God and the day you made the choice to put Him first in your life and your marriage.

## CHAPTER 2a

### “Gifts Men and Women Give Each Other”

Genesis chapter 3 is the classic story of the fall of man but there is much more here than meets the eye as I have studied it more and more.

This chapter is going to be a little speculative at points. Nothing I write is Scripture and you, the reader, have no obligation to accept anything I say. Nonetheless, I invite you to dive into this chapter with me and consider what lessons we might learn from Adam and Eve and how, therefore, men and women still interact with each other in the face of tragedy to this day.

I also want to state up front that I believe in the literal story of Adam and Eve, their literal fall from paradise because of their sin, and the literal curses that God put on all that still exist to this day. The parallel I am making between Adam and Eve and other young couples is no way meant to denigrate any of those facts. I believe simply looking at Adam and Eve as a married couple for this illustration helps us understand how young couples also often fall and why. Knowing this, maybe we can avoid similar mistakes!

It is scientific and obvious fact that girls mature faster than boys in the early years of development. Look at how Genesis 3:1 begins – the serpent approaches Eve first. The woman encounters evil and the more mature temptations of the world before men do. So, this is accurate.<sup>11</sup> A woman must wrestle with the nature of truth and falsehood, good and evil, fleshly desire and jealousy, before man does. And again, this is accurate – this is how it works in the real world.

Not only do boys not mature as fast as girls, but it is girls themselves that unintentionally introduce boys to all these concepts. It is not until a boy is first infatuated with a girl that he feels temptation, judgment, and an external force to mature. It is the feminine ideal (as boys always think the first girl they are attracted to is perfect) that judges him simply by her existence and he immediately begins to try to pawn at what it might take to both please and have his ideal. This is the process that leads to maturation for men over time. And

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<sup>11</sup> Again, how can these stories be false and yet have so much worth and truth in them?

since he is clueless how to do this, boys start out doing such stupid things on their way to figuring it out!

The alternative is that boys without strong women peers in their lives do not grow up; we see this all over in our culture. These men become grown up infants, not men at all – and it is an ugly thing. Women have this unique role to play in that since they grow up first, they must expect their men to grow up too – because if they don't force these grown-up ideals onto men – then the men don't grow up<sup>12</sup>. It is also therefore interesting to note that women mature naturally; men must be forced to grow up, and it is by strong women peers they do so.

It is Eve who eats the forbidden fruit first. It is also Eve who, first thing after, gives some to Adam. Adam does not balk at all. The “food” a woman gives a man is the food he eats, for better or worse. This is still true today – most men could build whole worlds if the women both setup the ideal and then genuinely encourage and support their man to achieve it<sup>13</sup>. However, many women choose to use shame and guilt on their men after setting up the ideal (because inevitably he does not do it perfectly), and men very quickly come to the [truly reasonable] conclusion, “If I'm not going to get credit for bearing responsibility, I'll just do nothing at all.” So, women, encourage a good man at every chance as the alternative is counter-productive!

From the beginning of time, women have primarily been involved in distribution while men have been involved in production. Therefore, Eve distributes the food to Adam, and it is only then that they both fall at the same time (as all marriage difficulties always effect both spouses, not just one).

Parents mostly look on helplessly when their children begin to date. The kids are so excited, and parents are so nervous, because they know the many potential pitfalls ahead, and inevitably, some or even all those pitfalls will manifest themselves. This is because the kids are acting like Adam and Eve, in

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<sup>12</sup> Therefore, “hook-up culture” is such a terrible idea. When all women voluntarily withheld sex before marriage, it forced all the men of society to grow up. When women reversed course, the men didn't have to grow up and they didn't.

<sup>13</sup> Women design civilization; men build it. Women manage civilization; men lead it. This is true for the healthy home and the healthy nation.

a way – blindly venturing into maturity together – not anticipating the difficulties that accompany all relationships.

Genesis 3:7 says when they both ate the forbidden fruit “their eyes were opened.” It does not take long for a couple to be a couple and for their eyes to be opened reluctantly but still obviously to the problems that befall all couples (and the humble realization by one or both that they are not immune to them). And it’s because they listen to the snake of temptation too, instead of the reason of their [heavenly] parent.

Then, when the young couple falters, just like Adam and Eve’s solution in that same verse was insufficient to cover their shame, so a young couple’s solutions to solve their own problems are inadequate. Adam and Eve needed God’s help – including His judgment<sup>14</sup> – to eventually, somehow, perhaps transcend above their self-afflicted death sentence.

Adam and Eve then hide from God in the next verse. What do typical young couples do when their problems suddenly show themselves? Most hide and try to ignore the judgmental ideal that is bearing down on them. Now, the judgmental ideal is harsh but also inevitable. And the judgmental ideal is also the redeemer too! Now that’s an idea to unpack for the rest of your life: what is judging you can also save you if you will let the judgment and its consequences run its course and learn from it. The trouble with marriage is often that only one or none of you are interested in this course of action. Therefore, it is so important to enter marriage with the knowledge that this is not just a live-in arrangement but a life-changing new creation of a family preparing to weather the tragedies that are coming. Anything else crumbles before the storm; anything else gets washed away in the flood.

Adam and Eve do end up having to face God and take their severe, life-changing, world-lasting licks. And it turns out the consequences for their sin is to wake up to the ever-present dangers of temptation, evil, suffering, and malevolence that will not only affect them but their children after them as well. And again, this is right: what you make out of your marriage will influence generations to come. Are you ready for that kind of responsibility? This is what

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<sup>14</sup> Unpack this idea for the rest of your life: the Judge is the same as the Redeemer.

marriage brings. But it also is in that responsibility that meaning in your marriage is [pro]found, and little has more meaning for life than a marriage that can weather storms and build a strong heritage.

Satan is cursed first. That's right, so although you will be judged, the evil itself is judged first and foremost. You are still at fault but at least you have the comfort of knowing that the evil that befell you will not get away with being evil. If you have any decency, you hope that at least perhaps the next couple might be spared what you were not.

Also, God punishes the tempter before his own children. This is also accurate to life as we know it. God will discipline us<sup>15</sup>, but that's different than merely punishing us. His discipline is for our good and growth, where as mere punishment, like by the state, is simply a deterrent not to do it again. It is good to be in the hands of a loving judge, even if He be a judge, which He must be.

Also notice that everybody is at fault, everybody gets blamed, and everybody is punished. No one is excused because of the influence of another. Long-term success is contingent upon knowing this and acting accordingly.

There are two final and super-important elements to the story of the fall (and thus marriage) that again relate to the world as we know it - the introduction of sacrifice and the banishment from paradise.

After God lays out the curses for mankind (which literally still inflict us to this day, in case you need more proof this story is both true and as relevant as it gets), God makes clothes of animal skin for Adam and Eve as permanent coverings (Genesis 3:21).

This is both an act of mercy and one of great horror: Adam and Eve are now in need of durable clothing, so God makes it, but to make it, an animal they were originally entrusted with, personally named, and surely personally loved, had to die so they could live. Due to their sin, another had to die in their place. Of course, this is a consistent theme through Scripture, culminating in the sacrifice of Christ for our sin. But it's also deeply personal, more than what we already know: sacrifice is not just applicable to the animal that died for Adam and Eve, or Christ who died for us (of which no sacrifice or love is

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<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 12:4-11



greater), but sacrifice itself applies to us, every day, and all of time. Make no mistake - sacrifice is both profoundly horrifying and exceedingly necessary for success.

The truth is that sacrifice is the most brilliant (and terrifying) idea of all time and somehow our culture has managed to sack it away as just an outmoded relic of the past. Yet, we sacrifice every day, if only we could see it: we go to work now to have money later (although everybody agrees taking the day off would be immediately more pleasant), we store money away for later instead of spending it today, we put off watching a TV show to get the dishes done so the next meal can be eaten, etc. But let's take it a step even further:

Sacrifice is bargaining with the future. It is a hedged, legal, divine, and necessary bet to succeed. It is a bet because no matter what you do, even no matter what you sacrifice, there is nothing on this earth that is guaranteed. Nonetheless, even without a lack of a guarantee on the future, we all know it is very useful to sacrifice now for the greater possibility of a better tomorrow. In fact, when practiced regularly, sacrifice has this strange way of of boiling over, exponentially multiplying, into marvelous benefits we cannot predict. But we must make the right sacrifices, and just like Adam and Eve, the right ones are never the easy ones.

The year 2003 was the last time I bought and played a long, epic video game. I had been playing them in my spare time my whole childhood, but the future required I sacrifice them for the greater things ahead like marriage, kids, and how I would provide for both going forward. I still enjoy video games, but short ones, and now 15 years later, I don't even consider them part of even the edges of my happiness. If I don't play them or get to play them, it does not matter. They are merely fun diversions at this point, something I can completely live without. I still enjoy talking about them, even reading about them too, but it's a minor distraction, a silly thing. What was a "big" sacrifice for me 15 years ago is a trifle now. This is one of those strange "comforts" of sacrifice; what was an obstacle to something greater not only gets out of the way when sacrificed but diminishes in importance over time as the meaning of the greater things sacrificed for manifest themselves in new, unexpected, and amazing ways.

A more serious sacrifice I made for the Lord was my IT business. It is hard to explain what it was like to take a business I spent 13 years, 90 hours a week building up, and then lay it on the altar of answering God's call into ministry. I resisted, I pulled back, I fought it, I rationalized it, I refused, I did everything I could not to sacrifice the only thing in my adult life that I had successfully built from scratch and was also the source of our family's income. It was scary beyond reason to sacrifice the known for the unknown, the more profitable for the less profitable, the freer versus being employed, all to do what God wanted me to do.

It turned out that a lot of my presuppositions were wrong, however. I thought I was sacrificing the more profitable for the less, but I have discovered treasures that far exceed the value of money. When the sacrifice was complete, I discovered work that was far more meaningful, as people are, than working on machines. I discovered that doing God's will leads to journeys unexpected, amazing opportunities ripe for the picking, and a fresh sense of hope that business could only give in the here and now.

The difficulties in this calling also have had sacrifice. I have had to deal with what seemed to be (at least at the time) impossible situations, confront malevolent people, and solve problems that on the surface had not even step one laid out. Some have told me, "Don't worry, Josh, God is just preparing you for something else in the future." That is not a comforting statement! That is terrifying! Nonetheless, I know they are right, and sacrifice requires I deliberately head towards the dragon's (i.e. serpent's) lair, armed with the whole armor of God, faith with courage to win the battle that I am not even aware of yet. The good news is that faithfulness guarantees the victory so follow that ancient path, the narrow path, the forgotten path - it alone leads to victory.

The final scene of the fall is also akin to this journey into marriage - the banishment from paradise. Dating, the engagement, the wedding, the reception, and the honeymoon - that's paradise - the marriage is leaving all that behind. Now, the real work in the real world begins, thorns, thistles and all. I am not being pessimistic about marriage, but rather it is very useful to know that marriage is not the same thing as what came before it, really no matter what that was; rather, it is the couple now entering the real world, and

the warning is you better be prepared. Like Adam and Eve, you better have allowed yourselves to be warned by God and you better have the provision God indicates, because you don't get to come back to paradise. Paradise was a one-time deal with a one-way-out ticket, and you have now spent it.<sup>16</sup>

Divorce cannot even change that. The entrance to paradise, once you leave, is blocked by a powerful angel with a flaming sword (Genesis 3:24). There is only one productive way forward – towards the Promised Land – not stopping by Sodom and Gomorrah.

And on the way, tragedy is coming. And that's precisely what happens immediately after Adam and Eve leave paradise – the story of their sons, Cain and Abel, is next.

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<sup>16</sup> This is nostalgia, by the way – you can't go back into paradise – you can only see it from the outside and remember it fondly.

## CHAPTER 4

### “Good Begets Better, Bad Begets Worse”

In Genesis 4:1-12, perhaps one of the most profound stories ever told is given: the death of Abel at the hand of his jealous brother Cain. Properly understood, volumes could yet be – and have been – written regarding these two brothers.

This new tragedy immediately follows the tragedy of the fall of man in Genesis 3, which immediately followed Adam and Eve’s marriage in the last verse of Genesis 2. You can ask your parents and grandparents, when things get bad, they can always get worse, and often do. You also have heard the phrase, “What can go wrong, will go wrong.” This is that story, and you do not get to be exempt from it:

Dating, the engagement, the wedding, the reception, and the honeymoon were all “paradise”: marriage is “the banishment to the real world”, so to speak, as it opens your eyes to the malevolence, the temptation, the judgment, and consequences of life fully. It is going into this unprepared that causes so many marriages to crack and fall apart so easily and quickly. Tragedy always comes and going into marriage naively often results in something like Cain and Abel.

I do not think it is any mistake that after Cain kills Abel, all we hear about Adam and Eve is they had another son to replace Abel, and they had other sons and daughters. Then they died. Two tragedies and they were done, so to speak.

This could be your story and likely will be unless you learn this story well (and others), avoid its mistakes, and intentionally attempt to form another narrative to live by (i.e. following the path God has laid down for successful marriages).

There is a law of nature called the Pareto principle in which 80% of the effects come from 20% of causes. A secondary nature of this same principle is that success or failure does not typically happen linearly, but rather that failure tends to accelerate more and more failure, and that success tends to accelerate more and more success.

The “Matthew principle” from Matthew 25:29 (and Luke 19:16) states something similar – “For to everyone who has more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he has does not shall be taken away.”

Both of these similar ideas carry fantastic promises and terrible possibilities: basically, if you do well, it is likely you will get even better, but if you do poorly, it is equally likely you will do even worse!

If we are honest, we observe this in the world every day; this is the way things are: the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, inequality over time gets worse. But the Pareto and Matthew principles apply not only to economics, but every area of life!

Interestingly, almost all attempts to buttress against the Pareto and Matthew principles result in even worse outcomes (i.e., the inequality usually gets worse instead of better after intervention). The better question may not be what to do about it, but can anything be done about it? These ideas are laws, after all, and typically when a law is broken it is not so much the law that is broken but the lawbreaker is broken upon the law!

So, if we assume, if only for the sake of this moment, that these laws cannot be broken, it is obviously far better to be the good getting better than the bad getting worse! And that is the only choice, for sure, you have about the Pareto and Matthew principle: whether you will be the good getting better or the bad getting worse. There is little or no in-between. There is no avoiding the problem or sticking your head in the sand. There are no neutral players.

There is a good chance you already have many, many examples of the bad getting worse. If you have a family like that, the possibilities you will continue that trajectory are very high unless you intentionally plot and keep a course directly away from that.

Hence the story of Cain and Abel, and our lives: Cain and Abel are called to make a sacrifice (remember sacrifice from last chapter?), and they both make one. That is interesting; Cain is not disapproved because he did not make a sacrifice, but rather that the sacrifice was not good enough in God’s eyes.

We tend to think of any amount of sacrifice as enough but indeed it is not: the sacrifice must be sufficient enough to merit the benefits sought. We are not the exceptions. Cain and Abel both desired to please the Lord, but Cain did not bring the sacrifice that accomplished that goal. The result was that Abel was approved (good getting better) and Cain was disapproved (who would then consequentially move from bad to worse).

Now one promise of this story from Cain's perspective is that his situation did not immediately get worse, and it did not get worse beyond his control, at least at first. Fortunately, the Pareto and Matthew principles do not seem to be without checkpoints and potential for mercy. Rather, the Pareto and Matthew principles seem to predict our course more than make it. This a relief, but also a great responsibility - because if we make the bad choice - then it is not the principle that condemned us, but our actions the principle merely predicted.

Cain made his choice and moved from bad to worse by first making the wrong sacrifice and then killing his brother because of jealousy.

What went wrong regarding Cain here is worth unpacking more than fits the scope of this book. But for our sakes, how does his mistake, and even Abel's fate, play into our lives?

First, we must remember that the marriage of Adam and Eve and their fall from paradise is the backstory of Cain and Abel, and part of why this story even happened at all is because of those two facts.

That seems harsh: to blame marriage and Adam and Eve for more than even they themselves did. After all, Adam nor Eve pulled the blade on Abel for Cain. But that misses the point - Adam and Eve married, sinned, were banished from paradise, and then had children. God specifically spelled out the consequences for all that - including the responsibilities in marriage and the consequences of their subsequent sin like death. He also said their descendants would suffer from these things. All these things are manifest in the story of Cain and Abel.

Second, the immediate consequence of Abel's right sacrifice was the favor of God but the longer-term consequence (and harsh truth) was that he would be murdered by his jealous brother.

The truth is that Abel's sacrifice had nothing to do with Cain's until Cain decided to compare himself with his brother, which is something God never did. Cain's sacrifice was only being compared to God's standard. Nonetheless, Cain inadvertently decided to kill Abel although this did not solve his problem at all.

This is also how the world works - your success will be subject to persecution simply because you are successful and so much of the world is not. When the Pareto and Matthew principles are working in your favor exponentially, do not be naïve because the jealousy of the world and the danger associated with that exponentially grows with it.

As one wise man one time said, "Be careful who you share good news with."

Imagine the story if Abel had given his sacrifice in private, had that been possible, and never told Cain the positive outcome. Cain never would have known and would never have compared his sacrifice to Abel's, sparing Abel's life.

This may seem like victim-blaming but that is missing the point: you should succeed silently if possible. Keep your gains private and any expression of your success muted. Assume the world is jealous and that is dangerous; do not give potential Cain's in your life any leverage in which to act.

Third, sometimes persecution for your success happens despite your best efforts to humbly conceal it. Or, in Abel's case, you just do not see it coming (you never imagined your success could invite retribution). In this case, you will have to make a second, personal sacrifice to transcend the persecution, like Abel.

Hopefully, unlike Abel, the sacrifice is not so severe as death, but many persecutions feel like that or as they say, "some things are worse than death." The only way to endure such unfair persecution is 1) accept it voluntarily and 2) do not curse he who persecutes you, but as the Sermon on the Mount says,

3) pray for your enemies. You might also have to confront them courageously. Do not underestimate the enormous power of this last option.

Why does this work? Abel's legacy in the Bible is that Jesus Himself called him the first prophet (Luke 11:50-51), he is named as one of the eighteen faithful examples in Hebrews 11, and his blood is even compared to Jesus' blood in Hebrews 12:24. His listing among the justified faithful in Hebrews 11 means Abel will transcend his own death by the power of Jesus' resurrection on the last day (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Similarly, if you suffer as Abel did on any level because you gave the right sacrifice in proper faith to God, then your success will outlive you, even your words will follow you, and even you have hope itself later. The sacrifice of enduring righteous persecution results in the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven itself (Matthew 5:11-12).

Finally, some avoidable tragedies like Cain and Abel happen in our lives if we enter the real world after marriage naïve, fallen, and unprepared. Only equipped, faithful, and with a Pareto and Matthew-principle positive plan both aimed for and worked towards might avoid these kinds of catastrophes. Some tragedy is unavoidable, but these kinds sometimes are avoidable, and it is worth living in such a way as to avoid the foreseen pitfalls as much as possible.



## CHAPTERS 6-8

### “Build Your Boat; Your Flood is Coming”

Many people wish that God would just appear to them, tell them He exists, and then tell them what He expects them to do.

If you read the beginning of Genesis 6 with any degree of seriousness, you will absolutely hope that none of that ever happens to you:

The story is that Noah is 500 years old, has a wife and three sons, and then out of nowhere God appears and tells him to build an unbelievably large wooden boat (manually, with ancient technology, mind you), put him and his family and thousands of animals in it, or die, because a flood is coming that will swallow up all who are not in the ark.

Noah never gets a word in. God has spoken and disappears. That’s it – “Build the ark or you’re done.”

It’s the same message from the story for us – build your “ark” or tragedy will sweep you away.

As we have discussed in previous chapters, tragedy is inevitable, so it is not a matter of whether we will have tragedy or choose to participate in it, but only if we will be prepared for it.

We also discussed how preparing for tragedy is multi-dimensional: it certainly isn’t just a matter of money. In fact, it may not be a matter of money at all. One goal for a marriage in anticipation of inevitable tragedy is to get to a point where automatically, due to the bulwarked nature of the relationship, if everything that was loved was lost, you know for sure you could and would rebuild.

That’s preparation for tragedy that not only transcends the utility “of having enough money in the rainy-day fund” but may actually need to and could replace it entirely. That is the kind of preparation we are talking about.

And that only comes from mutual participation via intentional personal growth: learning together, goal-setting and goal-striving together, going to church together, learning to correct and be corrected in love, make mistakes

and forgive and be forgiven. This must be intentional and deliberate and sacrificial. Done right, it will hurt before the tragedy hurts; it will build inoculation to pain by giving pain its due, the sacrifice the proper bleed.

The story of Noah's ark requires that we take tragedy even another step further: perhaps the best we can do sometimes is to save our family (i.e. keep it together) in the face of tragedy.

Noah tried to preach to everyone else for decades while he built the ark (2 Peter 2:5) and he had zero converts. Zero, none. He tried to save other people outside his family but couldn't. It wasn't up to him, he tried anyway, and he failed. He succeeded in building the ark to save his family. And that was all he could do, although he was noble and right to try.

There is a profound lesson in that. It is hard enough to get your act together and it is near-impossible to put your family together. So, so many people fail at this. The most well-off, the most powerful, the most influential people often fail to put their families together. It's the ark - it's the hardest thing to do - to save your family.

Because tragedy comes, and your only hope is to build your ark and weather the storm.

This may well be why any collective group beyond the family always ultimately fails (whereas families only commonly fail) - there is not a community, a government - local or larger, that has survived time. It is barely the case that a family can survive time: tragedy is universal and frequent enough that it shatters things repeatedly, regularly. It is very rare that any one family can build their ark and survive it themselves; it is even more rare that generation after generation would do the same.

So, again, building your ark must be intentional. And you know you're doing it right when it is very hard to do and the task, at least in the beginning, gives feelings of being overwhelming.

When Noah was told to build the ark, God might as well have told him to build a computer: no one had ever done it before - not a boat that size - not a wooden structure on that scale. Not until the Ark Encounter in Williamstown Kentucky has another Ark ever been built to scale. It was one of a kind, built

by a single man and his family (who were also one of a kind), over decades, with primitive tools, with no other choice but to die.

The floods came. God shut the door of the Ark. Everybody outside died. They surely climbed mountains, tried to float on rafts; inevitably they cried out to God who heard them but didn't answer. Tragedy came and swallowed all those without arks. That was everybody but one family, but even that one family's challenges were far from over:

Forty days and forty nights of rain. Hushed cries and screams from the last of those perishing outside, near the ark. Waves and lightning and thunder and bumps in the night; animals screeching and wailing and barking and roaring. The very stuff of nightmares, the very extinction of humanity bar eight souls.

In the center of the destruction of the world, they floated. They fed the anxious beasts, prayed themselves, hoped the boat would hold together. Because there is no guarantee that something you built will survive the storm: only God's hands ensuring the nails hold, the pitch doesn't give way - faith He keeps His promises, He brings His children back to dry land.

The rain stopped and the water started to abide. A pigeon was sent, and then a dove. And then a second dove. No signs of life; no twigs or leaves at first. There may not be any waves anymore; things are better than they were, but there still are no signs of the hope hoped for. Until the dove does return, by the grace of God.

And that is so important - by the grace of God. When tragedy comes, when the storm tries with all its might to tear your ark to pieces and kill you, it will not ultimately be your effort that keeps the boat together - it will be the grace of God. His mercy bestowed upon you not because of merit but because of love. God not only loves you, you need His love. Because when the floods come, He needs to shut the door and keep you in. While the devil tries to burn your boat with the hottest of hell's flames, you need God's divine hand staying the spark.

Building the ark is all you can do but God can do the rest. Be sure you build the ark to His dimensions; He has specified what to believe and how to

live. So, when the eating and drinking and marrying and be given in marriage ceases the day the flood waters rise from the ground, you are ready.

Be ready, because again, tragedy is coming.

## CHAPTER 11

### “The Unknown, Shocking Dangers of Unbelief”

I have become convinced of late that maybe atheism isn't a lack of unbelief in God. Instead, maybe it is the choice to do without God.

I don't see how any atheist would disagree with that assessment. It is functionally the same thing. However, the second definition gives an understanding of atheism that the first does not: while both are undeniably true of atheists – the second is simultaneously true of everything ever said about Satan as well.

And that should stop you in your tracks and rethink unbelief altogether.

Regardless of whether you believe in Satan, the very idea of Satan is exactly that: the first being to decide to do without God.

And then nothing ever written about him ever again in the history of the world in any culture, even in any religion, was ever good. There is universal agreement that he who decides to do without God has a primordial example: Satan, Set, Hades – he who fell from heaven to hell – he who deceives but first deceived himself that this was ever a promising idea to begin.

Is this fair? Is this accurate? Is there any proof at all in known history that puts this image and qualities of Satan squarely in line with those who choose to do without God?

Atheism on a mass scale is a modern phenomenon: it was not until the “death of God” in culture, declared by Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>17</sup>, that societies started to toy with the idea of completely secular standards imposed on its citizenry.

The first, and still to this day, only two societies to attempt to fully do without God in their cultures were the Soviet Union and Communist China.

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that Nietzsche did not declare the “death of God” triumphantly. In his “Parable of the Madman”, he declares we will not have enough gauze in all the world to wipe up the blood spilt. In his book, “Will to Power”, he predicted that the 20<sup>th</sup> century would experience the deaths of millions because of the foundational values of our culture being swept away. He was right – more people died in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the hands of other men than all past centuries combined. Whatever you think of Nietzsche, he did get the problem right, and somehow prophetically predicted what would happen when culture “killed God”.

They were the first to remove the concept of the divine completely from their governments and then forcibly remove it from among their citizenry. The results?

Doing without God resulted in the quickest mass killings in history: about 60 million in the Soviet Union and 60 million in Communist China were slain in the name of “equality” as defined by man. Altogether, about 20 times more people died in the secular holocaust than did in the Nazi holocaust in the same century!

The great autobiographer of the Soviet Union, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, said this about the first great atheist experiment through which he had to live:

“More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened. Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.”

This “quote to end all quotes”, at least in this preacher’s opinion, was part of a greater speech called, “Godlessness: the First Step to the Gulag.”

He lived it; anyone who wants to argue against it must argue against him, his collective experience, and the collective experience of others who also lived through it and with the Word of God who has always warned against such things. Any argument about the above is not with me or you, dear reader.

It is hard to put into words how bad of an idea atheism really is: if the image and works of Satan being at the very origin and heart of your worldview is not enough to make you run from the flames of hell as fast as you could run away from any imminent disaster, what would? When history confirms such an

idea may be the most dangerous idea ever conceived of fallen men, what would convince you that atheism may be the least desirable of all worldviews?

This leads us to our final lesson for this book: the unknown, shocking dangers of unbelief as told to us from Genesis chapter 11, the classic story of the tower of Babel.

After the flood, the first mention we have of pagan religion is Genesis chapter 10 with King Nimrod. The first mention we have of men putting themselves and their values in place of religion is Genesis 11. This is the first story of the Bible about atheism and an atheist society. It alarmingly parallels the modern manifestations discussed above.

And this is a fair assessment because in Genesis 8 God tells the people to scatter, multiply, and fill the earth, but they didn't do that. Skip ahead to Genesis 11 and they are still together, and instead of obeying God, decide to do exactly the opposite: they decide to build a city for themselves to dwell in together, build a tower that would reach to heaven, and make a name for themselves (instead of honoring God's name).

The result? They failed - vs. 8. Why did they fail? Because God confused their language and scattered them forcibly.

This story, other than being literal, true history continuing the narrative of the coming Christ, also warns against godless totalitarianism:

Godless states fail. They have always failed and will always fail. And godless people, by definition, make up godless states. And they are, by definition, choosing to do without God, i.e. be Satan incarnate en masse. Therefore, it is no wonder that they, and the individuals committed, fail.

And just like Satan failed to usurp God's throne and make his own values<sup>18</sup>, so we too will fail with the same assumptions.

Atheism is Satanism cleverly disguised; it is so cleverly disguised that most have not put together that not believing in God means choosing to do without God, which is the foundational truth about Satan himself.

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<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel chapter 28 and Isaiah chapter 14. Also one of Nietzsche's terrible ideas.

Stay away, far away, from unbelief.

### Conclusion to Volume I

This book originally started as my attempt to write a book on the wisdom I have learned so far for the sake of the generation coming right after me.

The problem I ran into for months was such a work tends to become unintentionally boastful or pitiful. It was only when I constrained this project by the Word of God via Genesis that it finally saw completion.

This is still a book for the generation coming after, but it is now grounded in the Word of God as all wisdom should be.

Blessings to you and may you always seek wisdom in God's Word and not man.

- Josh Stucki