

Chapter 1

OUR BEGINNING AND OUR END



The Fog

We used to live in a beautiful little neighborhood up on a mountainside. Every morning when I drove the kids to school, we would descend the mountain and see the most glorious view: the sun would rise behind a beautiful snow-capped mountain, and a lovely valley of trees sat at its feet. We would always comment on how amazing and different it looked each morning depending on how the light hit, the clouds broke open, or the streaks of pink and orange would shoot across the sky. The beauty we encountered those mornings was a gift to my soul and something God continually used to speak to me and teach me lessons.

One morning was particularly stunning. The sky was a vivid blue, without a cloud in sight. The sun shone bright above the

majestic mountain, causing the snow caps to sparkle like diamonds. At the base of the mountain was a thick blanket of fog covering the whole valley. The way the sun hit the fog made it look like the ocean shimmering below it. I've never seen anything like it—it took my breath away.

As we drove down the hill, the fog soon enveloped us. The sun disappeared quickly, and the fog was so thick I couldn't see more than two feet in front of or behind my car. The bright morning had suddenly turned dark and misty, and I thought, if I only lived in the valley below, I would never have known the sun was shining above and was going to burn away the fog and that the day ahead would be full of beauty and wonder. It was at that moment I heard the Lord speak gently to my heart. He said:

Pay attention to this, Heather. You often live your life like this, with very little perspective. You don't live with a strong vision of where you've come from and where you're going. *Most days you live in a fog, and I'm inviting you to lift your eyes higher so you can see things from a kingdom perspective.* I need for you to always carry with you the knowledge of where you have come from and where you are going.

This gentle encounter with the Lord set me on a path of reorienting myself to the larger story of salvation. That path led me to reencounter the Gospel with a new perspective, where I started to understand salvation history as *my* history and my own personal life as a part of the larger story that God was writing.

We all need a shift in our perspective, a shift from the natural to the supernatural. It's easy for us to look around and see and interpret the world through our own experiences, emotions, and beliefs about our life. We see a series of joys, sorrows, wins, losses, relationships, successes, failures, and so on. It's

much harder to look at these same things and see the meaning and purpose through the lens of faith, through a kingdom perspective, and in the context of the greater story that God is writing. We often look at life in the context of what we are dealing with and experiencing right now, but there is a much larger story happening and we are right in the middle of it.

It is vitally important that we reengage with what we think we already know about the story of God and open our hearts to hear it again with new ears and find out the new things God wants to reveal to us. A shift in perspective and a broadening in our understanding of what our life is all about, where we have come from, and our destination are essential in the journey of restoration. It will give us a compass to navigate our past, our present, and our future. So, let's begin to clear the fog by reorienting ourselves with the simple truths we often overlook.

God is love. I have heard this thousands of times throughout my life, but for years I didn't quite make the connection that if God is love (see 1 John 4:16), and we are made in his image (see Genesis 1:27), then we are made in the image of Love. Love! Isn't this what we all crave more than anything? To love and be loved? The reason this ache is so deep within us is that love is the image in which we were made. We were made out of Love, for Love, and to be in perfect union with Love forever. Well, that sounds like the best news I've ever heard! Why, then, does that good news seem to stay lost somewhere in the back of my mind and not at the forefront where it can influence the moment by moment of each day? Why does a fog descend into my heart and cause me to lose my way so often? What if that could change? How would my life be different if I lived with clarity and that perspective in my mind and heart daily?

If we don't know where we have come from and where we are going, it's very difficult to navigate the middle—and the middle is our entire life on earth.

Scripture is one of the most important places of truth that we can look to for clarity because it is God's own Word revealed to us, and he doesn't lie. We often look at scripture as a rather daunting book, filled with good ideas and lessons, but mostly ones we don't understand, and we struggle to see how they all relate to our daily life. In order for scripture to take on a personal quality for us, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to come and illuminate our hearts and minds with his truth.

When scripture is experienced for what it really is, it changes everything. It isn't a boring, old, irrelevant book; on the contrary, this is the greatest love story ever told and still unfolding, the truest story to which every other great story points. This is why good books and movies stir our hearts so deeply: they echo the story of our salvation history and what has been written in the core of our hearts as human beings. Within the pages of scripture, we see love, deception, war, healing, infidelity, restoration, adventure, courage, sorrow, romance, loss, and triumph. Do you experience scripture like this when you read it? Let's pause for a moment and pray.

Come Holy Spirit and illuminate my mind and heart to understand the scriptures, the story of my salvation history, with clarity and power. Speak life and truth into my very being and cause your Word to become real to me. Amen.

I'd love for you to join me on the journey back to the beginning and listen to our salvation history with new ears. Can I tell you a story?

The Love Story

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve. Their story in Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve could hear God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Could you imagine going into your backyard to walk and talk with God in the cool of the day? Life was perfect before the fall; everything was as it was meant to be and was in perfect harmony and union with God. There was no pain, no tears, no hiding, just perfect intimate love. This is what we were made for, and it was supposed to stay that way forever, but we all know that is not how the story goes. One of the greatest gifts God ever gave us is the gift of free will—the ability to choose for ourselves. If there was only one option and if we were forced to love God, then we wouldn't really be free and it wouldn't truly be love. God wants our relationship with him to be out of a place of freedom instead of an obligation.

In the Genesis story, we see the choices for Adam and Eve quickly appear. The enemy, in the form of the serpent, entered into the garden and began telling Adam and Eve lies, lies that caused them to question the very heart of God. For the first time, their trust in God was challenged, and doubt crept in. In their dialogue with the enemy, essential questions arose in their hearts and they wondered, "Is God really good? Was he holding something back from them by not letting them eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What if that fruit would make them even happier?" Here we see the fog and confusion start to settle into their hearts. They began to forget who God was, forget where they came from, forget that he was trustworthy, and desired their good even more than they did

themselves. So, they chose to go their own way and ate the fruit, in search of something other than God to make them happy.

“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘*Where are you?*’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself’ (Gn 3:8–10; emphasis mine).”

At that moment, a catastrophic rupture occurred in the relationship between God and humanity, and union with God was lost. In their deep shame, Adam and Eve hid and covered themselves. They were scared, they were embarrassed, they didn’t want God to see them, and they likely didn’t think he loved them enough to overcome their sin. God came to the garden to walk with them as he did each day, but this day, they were nowhere to be found.

The question in Genesis I find particularly beautiful is when God calls to them and asks, “Where are you?” as if he doesn’t already know. Sometimes we can read a line in scripture like that and put a tone to God’s voice based on the previous negative experiences we have had. We could interpret the voice of God saying those words harshly, with disdain, with disappointment, and with intent to shame them, but if we truly understand the heart of God and his desire for union, would he not have said it with gentleness, mercy, and love? Where are you my beloved ones?

The tone we apply to God’s voice in scripture is important because this is

the tone we hear in God's voice when
he speaks to us in our lives.

When God saw Adam and Eve in their shame and the massive chasm of sin dividing them from himself, he immediately began to pursue them and the reunification of the relationship. There was no way for humanity to regain perfect union with God on our own. We were utterly lost. Only God could restore this; only God could save us because, as scripture says, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). That was the only option for us; it was just and what we deserved. In this place of being completely helpless and doomed to die, we see the incredible heart of God. Filled with radical mercy, compassion, and faithful love, he refused to let us go. He would not let us be separated from him forever. Thus, the Father began his plan of restoration, to make a way and bring us back to himself, to close the gap between us and save us from being separated from Love for all eternity. He made an unbreakable covenant with us.

We see over and over again throughout the Old Testament the same cycle occurring. God makes a covenant and his people continue to fail; they are unfaithful, they go their own way, and through it all, God remains faithful. God's word is not like ours: what he says is always true, and when he makes a promise, he always comes through. God has been unrelenting in his pursuit of us and was always committed to being all in, even to the point of sending his own Son to die for us and pay the price we could not pay, so we could be restored to union with him. The culmination of his whole rescue plan was in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (Is 53:5).

Many of us have very little understanding of what this all means, yet this is the pinnacle of the entire story of our entire faith. It deserves regular, consistent pause and reflection, but most of all, it deserves a personal response from us. The whole story needs to move from the exterior to the interior, from being a story about someone else to internalizing it as your story and my story. Jesus didn't die just for the world; he died for me and he died for you, personally. Not only did the Israelites show infidelity to God, but I have and I still do. In my heart and in my life are similar stories as are written about in scripture, and when I'm honest, I am not the hero in those stories. I am the unfaithful one, I am the harlot, I am Pilate, I am the roman soldier, and that makes me desperately in need of a savior.

Here's the good news: we *already have* a savior. Our knowledge and experience of Jesus as Savior also needs to move from the exterior to the interior. He's not just a savior; he's your Savior. We don't need to go looking for him in earthly pleasures or worldly ideals. Jesus has already adopted us as sons and daughters through our Baptism. And his death on a cross for our individual sins deserves a personal response from each of us. I'd like to encourage you to pause for a moment. Is there anything stirring in your heart that you'd like to say to Jesus in response to his love? If you're not sure, that's okay. My hope is that throughout this book you will encounter Jesus in a more personal way and that a desire to respond to him would come naturally.

Heaven

In the book of Revelation, God promises that one day, we will have no more tears, no pain, no sorrow, and that all things will be made new. No shame, no rejection, no anger, no brokenness,

no more aching. Our hearts, souls, bodies, and desires will be completely satisfied by the One whom we were meant to be with from the very beginning. God will be one with us again, and we will finally be *home*. Until that day comes, we are not meant to just suffer and white-knuckle it through life. We are invited to wait in joyful hope for the coming of Jesus, and while we wait, we will inevitably struggle, but we will also have opportunities to experience some of that unity now. We can be healed and restored now, and taste joy in living life to the full today: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18).

We all find ourselves experiencing the effects of the fall, places of disunity, and disintegration within our own hearts and relationship with God. The truth is that the same God who set out to rescue humanity is here to rescue *you*. He wants a perfect union with *you*. No hiding, no walls, no shame, nothing in between, and as vulnerable and maybe even scary as that may sound, this is the deepest desire written upon your heart, to be one with the One who made you, loves you, and knows you. He knows every hair on your head, the curve of your smile, the quirks in your personality, the aches in your heart, your strengths, your weaknesses, your pain, your passions, the things that make you come alive, your hunger and thirst for life to be amazing. He knows you more than you know yourself and he *chooses you*, he wants you. He always has and always will.

Pause now to connect with your story and the greater story of salvation. Are you willing to let the rescue of your heart begin? Are you open to hearing the voice of God call to you, as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden, “Where are you?” Friend, where are you right now? Where are you hiding? Why

are you in the shadows? Isn't it exhausting and lonely there? Are you willing to be vulnerable and let him see you? Will you let yourself be found?

Pause & REFLECT

Take some time to journal and reflect on the following questions:

What are the things in my life that create “the fog,” the things that make it difficult to remember who I am and God’s plan for me?

What are the things I do or don’t do that frequently cause a rupture in my relationship with God?

When I think about heaven, what comes to mind?

Am I ready to commit my life to Jesus and accept him as my Savior?

Slowly and thoughtfully pray these words:

Jesus, you are the Son of God and I believe in you. I believe you died for my sins and have made a way for me to be with you forever. I believe you want to heal and restore me. I want to come into the light of your presence and abide with you. I want to acknowledge that the story of salvation is my story. I am sorry, Lord, so sorry, for all the ways I have sinned against you. I ask your forgiveness for all the moments I have chosen to go my own way and turn away from you. Jesus, I want to commit my life to you; I choose you. I ask that you would come into my life and be my Lord and Savior. I pray that you would restore me, heal me, and set me free. I love you, I trust you, and I give my life to you. Amen.