



His Story

WALKING WITH JESUS

An unfolding story of God's character based upon love

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For Marilyn

Foreword

I write these reflections with gratitude for the patience of God, who has met me again and again along the road and taught me that walking with Jesus is not merely a belief to hold, but a life to practice.

I offer these pages as an invitation to consider what it means to walk with Jesus—not as a scholar explaining a theory, but as a fellow traveler sharing what I have learned along the way.

This story is told from my perspective of journeys I have taken through God’s written word. I have enjoyed Genesis, the book of beginnings, the books of Wisdom, the prophetic book of Daniel, and later the matching prophecies of Revelation. In between I discovered the treasure of the Gospels written by men who walked with Jesus, or with those who did. The thoughts I have condensed in these few pages are based on scripture rather than any special revelation.

To help us walk the story rather than merely study it, I have retold these biblical accounts as an imagined journey in which Jesus Himself speaks. The words I place on His lips are not new revelation but my attempt to voice, faithfully and reverently, what Scripture already shows us of His heart.

I have discovered the truth that Jesus lived and died as evidence of a far better life than that of pursuing Satan’s lies.

I dedicate this booklet to Marilyn, my wife, who has demonstrated God’s love to me and many others.

In preparing this booklet, I have received assistance from artificial intelligence tools, especially in refining wording, improving clarity, and considering tone. I am grateful for this help, while recognizing that the thoughts, convictions, and final decisions expressed here remain my own responsibility.

With that personal word of introduction, the story now turns from my own reflections to the larger invitation I believe Jesus extends to every soul: to walk with Him and see, step by step, what God has been revealing from the beginning.

Linden Lawrence

The Invitation to Walk

There is a road that runs through the whole of time, and One who has walked every step of it. He falls into stride beside you now, as though He had been waiting at this exact bend for exactly this hour. He does not rush. He does not scold. He simply begins to speak, and the world grows quiet enough to listen.

“Walk with Me,” He says, “and I will tell you a story. Not a fable, not a legend polished smooth by the retelling, but *the* story — the one beneath all the others, the one that explains why the stars sing and why your own heart aches for a home it has never seen. It is My story. And by the end of it, you will know something you may have doubted your whole life long: that God is good, and that His character is love.”

This is the reason for the telling. Long ago a shadow fell across the universe — not a shadow of dust or distance, but of *slander*. A lie was whispered about the goodness of God, and the whole long history that follows is the patient, costly, unhurried answer to that lie. Everything Jesus is about to show us is, in the end, a defense of His Father's name and His own — a vindication written not in argument but in mercy.

“Listen carefully,” He says, “because you are not only hearing this story. You are in it.”

Matthew 6:9 · John 14:9 · Revelation 12:7–11

ENCOUNTER ONE

Before the World Began

Scripture opens His story before the world itself. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God*" (John 1:1); and the Son speaks of the glory He shared with His Father "*before the world existed*" (John 17:5). We can begin where He begins — long before this earth began.

Before there was a sun to rise or an ocean to reflect it, there was a place He calls Gr.Ouranos — Heaven, the dwelling of the living God. It was not empty. He lived there with His Father in a fellowship older than time, a love that had no beginning because it had always simply *been*. And around them moved a great host of created beings, the angels: radiant, joyful, free — servants who were also friends, each one made to reflect back some facet of the glory they beheld.

It was a kingdom without fear. No one hoarded, no one schemed, no one wept. The law that governed it was not a chain but a description of love itself: that every heart delight in God and in one another. And because it was love, it could not be forced. Love that is compelled is not love at all. So even in that perfect place, the freedom to choose was woven into the very design.

Among that host, Scripture tells us, was one of the most glorious and gifted of all. The prophets look back on him with sorrow: an anointed cherub, *perfect in beauty*, full of wisdom, until iniquity was found in him (Ezekiel 28:12–15); the *son of the morning*, the light-bearer, fallen from heaven (Isaiah 14:12).

He was beautiful beyond the others, wise, honored, standing near the very throne. Every gift he possessed had been given to him. But he began to look at those gifts and forget the Giver. He began to gaze at his own splendor until the reflection became, in his mind, a source of its own. Pride is a slow poison; it does not announce itself. It began as a whisper inside him — *why should I not be first? Why should I not be as the Most High?*

And then the whisper turned outward. Lucifer began to spin, quietly at first, a divisive slander among the angels. He suggested that the government of Heaven was unfair. He hinted that God's law was restrictive, that His authority was self-serving, that a being as gifted as himself deserved more than he had been given. He accused the very One who had made him and loved him. The slander was aimed, precisely and deliberately, at the *character* of Jesus and of His Father — at the claim that God is love.

It was the first lie, and it split the heavens. Some of the angels believed the accuser. And so there was war in Heaven — not of swords, but of allegiance, of truth against falsehood. Michael and His angels stood for the truth; the dragon and his angels for the lie. The accuser could not prevail, and he was cast out, and with him the third of the host who had chosen him.

Scripture does not record what the Son said in that hour, but it shows us what He did. The dragon was cast down (Revelation 12:9), yet not destroyed. We may reflect that a lie is not answered by force: had God simply crushed the accuser, the watching universe might have wondered whether the charge held true — whether He ruled by power alone. Instead the accusation was left to stand, and God set out to

answer it not with a word but with His whole life. That answer is the story we are about to walk.

Revelation 12:7-9 · Isaiah 14:12-14 · Ezekiel 28:12-17 · 1 John 4:8 · John 1:1-3 · John 17:5

ENCOUNTER TWO

Let There Be

The path turns, and Jesus lifts His hand toward the horizon as though unveiling something. “Into that great controversy,” He says, “I spoke a world.”

“In the beginning,” He tells us, “My Father and I created the heavens and the earth. And when I began, the earth was without form and empty, and darkness lay upon the face of the deep — and the Spirit of God moved over the waters like a bird over its nest.”

Then came the first word ever spoken over this planet: *Let there be light*. And there was light, and it was good. He divided the light from the darkness and called them day and night. He hung the sky like a curtain, gathered the waters so that dry land appeared, and called the seas into their boundaries. He clothed the ground in green — grass and herb and fruit tree, each bearing seed after its kind, so that life could give rise to life without end.

He set the sun to rule the day and the moon and stars to rule the night, and He filled the seas with swarms of living things and the sky with wings. He made the beasts of the field and the creatures that creep upon the ground, and at every stage He paused and saw that it was good. There was nothing grudging in the making. It was the overflow of joy — a God who did not need a world, choosing to make one, simply because love creates.

And we may see in that generosity an answer to the accuser’s charge. The accuser had said God was selfish; yet the Maker did not build a fortress but a garden, filled with color no one

had asked for and song no one had earned. *The heavens declare the glory of God* (Psalm 19:1) — and a creation so lavish stands as its own quiet, patient witness that the One who made it delights to give.

And then, on the sixth day, He stooped low over the fresh red earth, and He made something unlike all the rest — not merely a creature, but a likeness of Himself.

And when the sixth day was done, all the host of heaven and earth was finished, and He looked upon the whole of it and saw that it was very good. But the story of the making does not close with the last creature. It closes with rest. “On the seventh day,” Jesus says, “I had ended the work I had made, and I rested from all My work. And I did for that day something I had done for nothing else in all creation — I blessed it, and I set it apart, and I made it holy.”

Scripture says God rested on the seventh day — not from weariness, for the everlasting God does not faint or grow weary (Isaiah 40:28), but to bless the day and set it apart (Genesis 2:2–3). We may receive it as a gift. The seventh day was the first full day Adam and Eve knew, given before they had labored a single hour or earned anything at all — a whole day simply to be with their Maker, to rest in being loved rather than in proving their worth. In a world where the accuser would soon whisper that they must strive and earn their place, one day in seven stood as a standing answer: they were His, and they could rest.

And Scripture ties that rest to the law God later gave on the mountain. The fourth commandment does not make a new day; its very first word is *Remember* — and one does not remember what has never been (Exodus 20:8). It calls the

people back to a day already old, already blessed since the seventh morning of the world, and it gives the reason plainly: *in six days the LORD made heaven and earth ... and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it* (Exodus 20:11). The rest given in Eden and the rest written in stone at Sinai are not two Sabbaths, but one.

Understood this way, the seventh day is not a burden invented at Sinai but a memorial of the rest first given in Eden — a weekly return to that unhurried morning, and, as Scripture calls it, *a sign between me and you ... that ye may know that I am the LORD that sanctify you* (Ezekiel 20:12). The Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27); and each time the day comes round it carries the same word first spoken in the garden — you are His, and you may rest.

Genesis 1:1–25 · Genesis 2:2–3 · John 1:1–3 · Psalm 19:1 · Colossians 1:16 · Exodus 20:8–11 · Ezekiel 20:12 · Mark 2:27–28

ENCOUNTER THREE

The Garden and the Morning Walk

"His story is good news," Jesus reminds us, "and here is the first of it. As soon as I had made a world, I made a family to fill it."

He formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and the man became a living soul. He called him Adam. And seeing that it was not good for the man to be alone, He made from Adam's own side a woman, Eve — not from his head to rule over him, nor from his feet to be trampled, but from his side to stand beside him. These two were our very first grandparents, the first generation of the human family, and Jesus set them in a home called Eden, a garden of impossible beauty planted eastward, watered by rivers, heavy with fruit.

"I did not make them and leave them," He says. "I came to them."

In the cool of the early mornings He would meet them in the garden and walk with them, as friend walks with friend. He listened as Adam named them identified the ways of the creatures. He gave them work that was joy — to tend the garden, to keep it, to be stewards over all He had made. He was not a distant sovereign issuing decrees from a hidden throne. He was a Presence in the dawn, a Voice they knew, a Companion they loved.

And as they walked, He told them who He was.

"My character," He said to them, "and the character of My Father, is built upon one thing: love. Everything I have made, I have made in love. And

because love cannot be forced, I have made you free. I have given you the power of choice. You may love Me, or you may turn away. The choice will always be yours, for a love that is not chosen is not love.”

To make that freedom real, He set in the midst of the garden a single tree — the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — and told them not to eat of it. It was not a trap. It was the one visible sign of their freedom, the single place where they could say yes or no. Every other tree was theirs. This one tree stood as a daily, gentle question: *Do you trust that the One who gave you everything has told you the truth?*

For a while, they did. And the mornings were unbroken, and the walk was sweet, and the whole young world turned in peace.

Genesis 2:7–25 · Genesis 1:26–31 · Deuteronomy 30:19 · Joshua 24:15

ENCOUNTER FOUR

The First Lie

Jesus grows quiet, and the road seems to darken a little, though the sky has not changed. "The accuser who was cast from Heaven," He says, "did not vanish. He came to the garden. He came to My children."

He came cloaked, subtle, through the serpent, and he came to the woman with a question — for the lie almost never arrives as a statement. It arrives as a question that bends the truth just slightly out of shape. *"Has God really said you may not eat of every tree of the garden?"* The word *really* did its quiet work. It planted a suspicion where there had been only trust.

Eve answered rightly at first — they could eat of every tree but one. But the accuser pressed, and now he spoke the same slander he had spoken in Heaven, only aimed now at the ear of a human being. *"You will not surely die,"* he said. *"God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be as gods."*

There it was again — the ancient charge: God is holding out on you. God is not good. God is keeping something from you that you deserve. His restrictions are not love but control. It was the identical lie that had split the heavens, now offered as fruit.

And the woman looked, and the tree was pleasant, and she desired the wisdom it seemed to promise, and she took, and ate, and gave to her husband, and he ate. In that small and enormous act, they said with their hands what the accuser

had said with his lips: *we do not believe You are good enough to be trusted.*

The results came at once, and they were not the punishment of an angry God but the natural wages of turning from the source of life. Their eyes were opened — but only to shame. They saw their nakedness and hid. The intimacy broke. When they heard the sound of Him walking in the garden in the cool of the day, the sound that had always meant joy, they were afraid, and hid themselves among the trees.

“That,” Jesus says, and His voice is heavy, “is what sin does. It did not make Me stop loving them. It made *them* run from Me. The distance was never on My side. I came looking, as I always come looking.”

And into the silence of that ruined morning came the first question God ever asked a fallen human being — not an accusation, but a call, tender as a father searching a dark house for a lost child: “*Where are you?*”

Genesis 3:1–10 · John 8:44 · Romans 6:23 · James 1:14–15

ENCOUNTER FIVE

The First Promise

"Now hear the heart of My Father," Jesus says, and something like light returns to His face. "In the very hour of the fall, before the ground had cooled from the curse, I made a promise."

Standing before the serpent, He spoke words that reached across the whole of history: that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between the serpent's seed and hers; and that though the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's Seed, that Seed would crush the serpent's head.

It was a riddle to Adam and Eve, but it was a rescue. Hidden in it was the first gospel — the promise that One would come, born of the human family, who would take the wound of the serpent into Himself and in doing so destroy the accuser's power forever. From this moment on, every page of the story leans toward that coming One.

"Do you see what I did next?" Jesus asks. "They had made themselves coverings of fig leaves — the work of their own hands, thin and failing. I set those aside. And I made for them coverings of skin." He pauses. "For that, something had to die. The very first death in the history of the world was not a punishment I inflicted on them; it was a life given to clothe them. Even in Eden, at the beginning, love was already choosing to bear the cost of sin so that the sinner could be covered."

They could no longer remain in the garden, for the tree of life was there, and to live forever in a state of sin would be to

make their ruin eternal — so He sent them out, and set cherubim to guard the way, not in cruelty but in mercy, keeping the door of endless death from closing on them. Yet He did not send them out empty. He sent them out with a promise, with a covering, and with the knowledge that the God who walked with them in the mornings had already set in motion a plan of grace.

The accuser may have thought he had won — that by turning God's children against their Maker he had proven his lie, that they would sooner be free of God than with Him. But the promise just spoken said otherwise. The Son came *to seek and to save that which was lost* (Luke 19:10), and *to destroy the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8). From here, the whole story is of God coming after us — at any cost — rather than reigning without us.

Genesis 3:15, 21–24 · Isaiah 7:14 · Matthew 1:23 · 1 John 3:8

ENCOUNTER SIX

The Waters and the Bow

The road climbs, and from a rise Jesus shows us the generations spreading out below — the children of Adam multiplying across the young earth. “The promise I made in Eden,” He says, “I never withdrew. But the lie spread faster than the promise.”

As the family of man grew, so did its violence. The imagination of the human heart turned continually toward evil, and the earth filled with cruelty. “And here,” Jesus says, “I will tell you something the accuser never expected. It grieved Me. For it is written that *it repented the Lord that He had made man, and it grieved Him at His heart*. I am not a distant judge, unmoved. When My children destroy themselves, it wounds Me.”

Yet even then, mercy found a man. Noah walked with God — that same walk from the garden, still possible even in a broken world. And to Noah, God gave a warning and a way of escape: build an ark, a great vessel of safety, and gather into it your family and the living creatures, for the waters are coming. For a hundred and twenty years the ark was built in the open air, a slow sermon of wood and pitch, its very construction a long invitation to a scoffing world: *there is still room, there is still time, come*.

The flood came, and it was terrible, and the world that had given itself wholly to the lie was swept away. But the ark rose upon the waters, and everyone who had entered the door was carried safely through the judgment. “Never forget,” Jesus says, “that even in the flood, My purpose was to *save*, not to

destroy. I preserved a remnant so that the promise — the coming Seed — could still be kept.”

When the waters receded and the ark rested on the mountains, and Noah stepped out onto a washed and quiet earth, God set a sign in the sky — a bow of many colors arched over the clouds. It was a covenant, a promise made not merely to Noah but to every living thing and to every generation after: that never again would He destroy the earth by flood. “Whenever you see the rainbow,” Jesus says, “know that it is Me remembering My mercy out loud — turning the very sign of the storm into the sign of My faithfulness.”

Genesis 6:5–8 · Genesis 7–9 · 1 Peter 3:20 · Genesis 9:12–16

ENCOUNTER SEVEN

The Friend Who Believed

"To keep the promise," Jesus says, "I called one man, and through him a family, and through that family the whole world would one day be blessed."

His name was Abram, and he lived in a city of idols in a land called Ur. To him God spoke a startling word: leave your country, your kindred, your father's house, and go to a land I will show you. "He did not know where he was going," Jesus says. "He only knew Who was calling. And that was enough. He went out, not knowing where he went. That is what faith looks like — not certainty about the road, but trust in the One who walks it with you."

God made Abram a promise almost too large to hold: *I will make of you a great nation; in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.* And when Abram, childless and aging, wondered how such a thing could be, God took him outside beneath the desert night and said, *"Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to number them — so shall your descendants be."* And Abram believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness. "Mark that," Jesus says. "He was made right with God not by his goodness but by his trust. That is the doorway home. It always has been."

God gave him a new name, Abraham — father of many — and in time the impossible child was born, Isaac, the son of laughter and of promise. But then came a test that reaches to the very center of the whole story. God asked Abraham to take his beloved son up a mountain and offer him there. "Watch closely," Jesus says, "for this is a window."

Abraham went, trusting, believing God could even raise the dead. He laid the wood upon Isaac's shoulders, and the boy carried it up the hill — a son bearing the wood of his own sacrifice up a mountain. When Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb?" Abraham answered, "*God will provide Himself a lamb.*" And at the last moment, as the knife was raised, the voice of God stopped him, and Abraham looked, and there in a thicket was a ram, caught by its horns — a substitute, dying in the place of the son.

"Do you understand what Abraham saw that day?" Jesus asks. "He saw, from far off, the day when a Father would give His only Son upon that very range of hills, and no voice from heaven would stop the knife — because that time, there would be no other lamb. The Lamb would be My own self. Abraham named the place 'The Lord Will Provide.' He was more right than he knew."

*Genesis 12:1–3 · Genesis 15:5–6 · Genesis 22:1–14 ·
Hebrews 11:8–19 · John 8:56*

ENCOUNTER EIGHT

Out of the House of Bondage

Centuries turn beneath our feet as we walk. Abraham's family became a people, and that people came to Egypt in a famine and, over long generations, fell into slavery. "They groaned under their burdens," Jesus says, "and they cried out. And I heard them. I always hear them. I said, *I have surely seen the affliction of My people, and have heard their cry, and I know their sorrows; and I have come down to deliver them.*"

He called a shepherd named Moses — a fugitive, a stammerer, a man who thought his usefulness was behind him — and He met him at a bush that burned but was not consumed. From the fire He spoke His name: *I AM THAT I AM*. The eternal, self-existing One, the God who simply *is*, was sending a broken man to set a nation free. "I have never needed the strong," Jesus says. "I have only ever needed the willing."

Moses stood before Pharaoh, the mightiest king on earth, with nothing but a word from God — *let My people go* — and Pharaoh, who thought himself a god, refused. Plague after plague fell upon the land, each one a blow against the false gods of Egypt, each one another chance for a hard heart to soften. And then came the last night, and here Jesus slows His steps, for this night is the very shape of the gospel.

Each household was told to take a lamb without blemish, to kill it, and to strike its blood upon the doorposts and lintel of their house. "When I see the blood," God said, "*I will pass over you.*" Death came to Egypt that night, but wherever the blood marked the door, death passed by, and the family within

was safe — not because they were better, but because a lamb had died in their place and its blood stood between them and judgment. They ate in haste, dressed to travel, and before the dawn they were free.

"That lamb," Jesus says, "was Me, foretold. Every Passover for fifteen hundred years, they would kill a lamb and remember, never fully knowing that they were rehearsing the night when I would become the Lamb, and My blood would mark the door of every heart that trusts Me, and death would pass over."

Pharaoh's army pursued them to the edge of the sea, and there, trapped between the water and the sword, the people despaired. But Moses stretched out his hand, and God drove back the sea, and they walked through on dry ground with walls of water on either side. When the enemy followed, the waters returned. "Stand still," Moses had told them, "*and see the salvation of the Lord.*" "Remember that," Jesus says, "on the days when you are trapped. Your deliverance has never depended on your strength. It depends on Mine."

*Exodus 3:1-14 · Exodus 12:1-13 · Exodus 14:13-31 · 1
Corinthians 5:7 · John 1:29*

ENCOUNTER NINE

The Long Wait and the Promise in a Manger

The road grows long here, and Jesus lets us feel the length of it. God brought His people to a land of their own, gave them His law upon the mountain — not as a cage but as the description of a life that flourishes, a fence of love around a garden. He raised up judges to rescue them and kings to lead them. He gave them David, a shepherd boy who became a king after God's own heart, and to David He made a promise: that from his line would come a King whose kingdom would have no end.

“But the story of My people,” Jesus says gently, “is the story of every people. They forgot. They wandered after the old lie, chasing gods that could not save, and they suffered for it, and I sent them prophets — voice after voice, century after century — not to condemn them but to call them home.”

And through those prophets, the promise of the coming One grew clearer, like a face emerging from mist. Isaiah spoke of a virgin who would conceive and bear a son, and His name would be called *Immanuel* — God with us. He spoke of a child born to us, a son given, whose name would be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And in his most piercing vision, Isaiah saw a suffering servant — despised, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, upon whom the chastisement of our peace would fall, by whose stripes we would be healed. Micah even named the town: Bethlehem, small among the thousands of Judah, from which the Ruler would come.

“For four hundred years after the last prophet,” Jesus says, “the heavens were silent. My people waited in the dark, under the heel of empires, wondering if the promise had failed.” He stops on the road and turns to us, and there is wonder in His eyes, as though the memory still astonishes even Him. “And then, in the fullness of time — when the waiting was longest and the night was deepest — I came.”

Not in the splendor of Ouranos. Not with legions of angels descending in fire. The One who had spoken worlds into being, who had walked in Eden and named the stars for Abraham, laid aside His glory and was born as a human infant, in a stable, in Bethlehem, laid in a feeding trough because there was no room. “The accuser said I ruled from a distance, that I would not stoop, that I loved power more than My children,” Jesus says. “So I answered him by becoming a baby. I put Myself into human hands. I let Myself be that small, that near, that vulnerable. They shall call His name Immanuel — God with us. Not God above us, or God against us. God *with* us.”

*2 Samuel 7:12–16 · Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 53:3–5 · Micah 5:2 ·
Matthew 1:23 · Galatians 4:4*

ENCOUNTER TEN

The Face of the Father

"For thirty years I lived as one of you," Jesus says, "in an ordinary town, in an ordinary trade, growing, learning, working with My hands. And then I began to walk the roads of that land, and to answer the accuser not with arguments but with My life, in the open, where everyone could see."

"Watch what I did," He says, "and you will know what My Father is like, for I told them plainly: whoever has seen Me has seen the Father."

He touched the lepers no one would touch, and they were made clean. He opened the eyes of the blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf. He fed the hungry crowds on a hillside from a boy's small lunch. He stilled a storm with a word and walked upon the sea. But more than the miracles, it was *who He went to* that told the story. He sat down to eat with tax collectors and sinners, with the people the religious had written off. He defended a woman caught in adultery from the stones of her accusers and sent her away forgiven and free. He let a woman of the streets wash His feet with her tears. He called little children to Himself when others shooed them away.

"The accuser had painted God as harsh, exacting, quick to condemn," Jesus says. "So I told them stories about who God really is. I told them of a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to search the wilderness for one that is lost, and comes home rejoicing with it on his shoulders. I told them of a father — and oh, this is the truest picture of My Father's heart — whose younger son demanded his inheritance, squandered it in a far country, and came home in rags, rehearsing an

apology. And while he was yet a great way off, the father saw him — which means the father had been watching the road every day — and ran to him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and would not even let him finish his confession before calling for the best robe and a ring and a feast. *This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*”

“That father, running down the road with his robes hitched up, undignified with joy — that is My answer to the lie,” Jesus says. “That is who God is. The distance was never on His side. He has been watching the road for you since the day you left the garden.”

But the more clearly Jesus revealed the character of God, the more fiercely the accuser resisted, working now through the hardened hearts of men who loved their power more than the truth. The controversy that began in Heaven had come to a head on a dusty road in a small country, and it was moving, inexorably, toward a hill.

Luke 4-5 · John 14:9 · Luke 15 · John 8:1-11 · Matthew 11:28-30

ENCOUNTER ELEVEN

The Answer on a Hill

The road descends now, and it is hard to walk it, for we know where it leads. Jesus does not look away. "I knew from before the world began," He says, "that the answer to the lie would cost Me everything. And I came anyway. No one took My life from Me. I laid it down."

On the last night, in an upper room, He took bread and wine and gave them to His friends as a memorial of the body about to be broken and the blood about to be poured out. Then in a garden called Gethsemane — a garden again, always a garden — He knelt in the dark and faced the full weight of what was coming, and He sweat as it were great drops of blood, and He prayed, *"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done."* In that prayer the whole controversy turned. Where the first Adam in a garden had said, in effect, *my will, not Yours*, the second Adam in a garden said, *Your will, not Mine*.

He was betrayed by a friend, abandoned, arrested, tried through the night on false charges, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns. And they led Him out to a hill called Golgotha and nailed Him to a cross between two thieves. "They did not take My power," Jesus says, "I held it back. In any moment I could have called legions of angels. The nails did not hold Me to that cross. Love held Me there."

And from the cross, even then, He revealed the Father. He looked at the men driving the nails and said, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* He promised paradise to a dying thief who turned to Him in his last hour. And then, as the sky went black at midday and He took upon Himself

the full weight of the world's sin and the terrible sense of separation it brings, He cried out and gave up His spirit. The earth shook. The veil of the temple, the great curtain that had for centuries separated people from the Holy of Holies, was torn in two from top to bottom — torn from *above*, by the hand of God — for the way to Him was now open, forever, to anyone who would come.

“Here is the vindication,” Jesus says, and His voice is quiet and sure. “The accuser said that God demands but will not give, that God requires everything of His creatures and risks nothing Himself. And on that hill, God gave His own self. He entered His own creation, took the wound of the serpent into His own heel, and bore in His own body the cost of every sin ever committed. The lie could not survive that hill. What God asks of you, He first did for you. There is no darkness in Him at all. This is who He is.”

*John 10:18 · Luke 22:42 · Luke 23:34 · Matthew 27:45–51 ·
Romans 5:8 · 1 John 4:9–10*

ENCOUNTER TWELVE

The Morning That Broke

The road bends one more time, and — impossibly — there is light ahead, the pale gold of a particular dawn. Jesus is smiling now. “They laid Me in a tomb,” He says, “and sealed the stone, and set a guard, and the accuser exulted, for he was certain the story was over. He did not understand. He has never understood. Death could not hold the Author of life.”

On the first day of the week, very early, while it was still dark, the women came to the tomb with spices to anoint a body — and found the stone rolled away, and the tomb empty, and angels where the body had been, saying, *“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.”*

Mary Magdalene lingered, weeping, thinking the body had been stolen. And in the garden — for it was a garden, of course it was a garden — a man she took for the gardener spoke a single word: her name. *“Mary.”* And she knew Him. “That is how the resurrection meets you,” Jesus says. “Not as an argument, but as a voice that knows your name. The same voice that walked in Eden in the cool of the day, that called *Where are you?* through the trees — that voice was never silenced. It called Mary's name in the garden. It calls yours now.”

He appeared to His friends over forty days — not a ghost, not a vision, but risen, real, eating with them, showing them the wounds in His hands. The despairing became fearless. Men and women who had hidden behind locked doors went out into the streets of the world with a message that could not be stopped: *He is risen. Death is defeated. God is love, and love has won.*

“Because I live,” Jesus says, “you shall live also. The tomb that could not hold Me will not hold you. Everything the accuser stole in Eden — the walk, the morning, the life without end — I have begun to give it back. And I am not finished.”

Luke 24:1-6 · John 20:11-16 · 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 · John 14:19

ENCOUNTER THIRTEEN

The Story Not Yet Finished

We have walked a long way, and the light around us is strange and beautiful, the light of a morning that has not fully come. "Before I returned to My Father," Jesus says, "I made a promise, and I left My Spirit, and I set My people to work. The story you are living in now is the chapter between My first coming and My second."

"The controversy that began in Heaven continues to this day," He says. "The accuser was defeated at the cross, but he has not yet conceded. He still whispers the old lie — that God cannot be trusted, that His way is not good, that you would be freer without Him. He whispers it to you. And so the whole earth has become the theater where the question is answered one heart at a time: will you believe the accuser, or will you believe the One who died for you?"

But Jesus lifts our eyes to what is coming, for the last book of the story is not about the darkness but about the dawn. John, an old man exiled on an island, was given a vision of the end — and it is glory. He saw the accuser cast down at last, defeated and destroyed, the long war finally over. He saw a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation and tribe and tongue, standing before the throne. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old order of things had passed away.

And he heard a great voice from the throne saying the words toward which the whole of history has been straining: *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away every*

tear from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

"Do you see it?" Jesus asks, and His voice is full of longing and certainty at once. "It is Eden again, only greater. A garden with the tree of life, a river of the water of life, and no more curse. But this time there will be no serpent, no lie, no shadow. And best of all — the walk in the cool of the day, restored. God dwelling with His people. Me, with you, without any veil between us, forever. The morning walk that the accuser interrupted in the garden will resume, and it will never end."

"That is My story," He says. "It began before the world in the courts of Heaven, and it ends beyond this world in a city where I wipe away the tears. And through all of it — the war in Heaven, the garden, the flood, the promises, the manger, the cross, the empty tomb, and the world to come — there is only one thing I have ever been trying to say. The accuser said God could not be trusted. I have spent all of history proving otherwise. God is love. He always was. He always will be. And He wants you home."

*John 14:1-3 · Revelation 12:10-11 · Revelation 21:1-4 ·
Revelation 22:1-5*

ENCOUNTER FOURTEEN

The Walk Continues

The road does not end. That is the last thing you notice. You had thought a story like this would close with a final page, but instead the path simply keeps going, out beyond the rise, into a light you cannot yet see the source of. And He is still beside you.

"You see," Jesus says, "I did not tell you all of this so that you would admire it from a distance. I told you because you are in it. The controversy is real, and it runs through your own heart. The accuser still whispers to you the same words he whispered to Eve: *Has God really said? Is He really good? Are you not better off on your own?* And every day, in a thousand small choices, you answer him — with trust, or with turning away."

"But hear Me," He says, and He stops, and He takes your face in the truth of His words. "You do not have to be strong for this. You never did. Adam was not strong. Noah was not strong. Abraham stumbled; Moses stammered; David fell; the disciples fled. I have never needed your strength. I have only ever asked for your trust. Walk with Me. That is all. Let Me tell you who God is, again and again, until the old lie loses its hold and your heart finally believes what the whole universe was made to declare — that you are loved, that you have always been loved, and that the One who walks beside you would sooner die than lose you, and already has, and rose again, and is coming back."

And so the invitation that opened the story is the one that closes it, and it is held out to you now, on this ordinary day, on whatever road you happen to be walking:

***"Walk with Me, and I will tell you a story —
and by the end of it, you will know that God
is good."***

