

# ROUGH WATERS

A dramatic photograph of a sailboat on a turbulent sea under a cloudy, sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and casting long shadows. The water is dark and choppy, with whitecaps visible. The sailboat is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, facing right. The overall mood is one of struggle and resilience.

**A PRAYERFUL GUIDE TO  
ENJOYING SECURITY IN JESUS**

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**Dedication:**

To my friends in the storm, may you rest securely in the joy of Christ our anchor

**Acknowledgments:**

Thank you to my family, friends, and faith community who have walked this journey with me. We are truly pouring into one another to learn how to enjoy Jesus now and forevermore.

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# Preface

**W**elcome to *Rough Waters: A Prayerful Guide to Enjoying Security in Jesus*. This book is an invitation to embark on a transformative journey toward deeper trust and secure attachment to Jesus. Whether life feels stormy or uncertain, whether spiritual striving has left you weary, or you've felt distant from God, this guide is designed to meet you exactly where you are.

This book serves as both a personal companion and a resource for community as you move toward secure attachment in Jesus. Each chapter is carefully structured with intentional sections to guide your exploration, reflection, and growth—inviting engagement of both heart and mind, alone or with others.

## **Scripture as Our Foundation**

At the heart of every chapter is a commitment to dive deeply into Scripture. These biblical foundations anchor our understanding, invite God's wisdom, and open pathways for transformation. As you read, may God's Word speak directly to your life and become a steady guide through every step.

## **Practical Application**

Each chapter offers concrete, practical steps for daily living—simple actions or practices to help you embody the truths you're learning and cultivate habits that nurture trust and freedom in Jesus.

### **Journaling Prompt**

An invitation to engage more personally through writing, offering sacred space to process thoughts, express emotions, and dialogue with God, enriching your journey of faith and healing. There will be some room to write in the book but feel free to have another journal alongside.

### **Reflection Questions**

To deepen thought and prayer, each chapter includes questions designed to explore your experiences, challenge assumptions, and help you lean into God's guiding presence more fully.

### **Group Discussion**

If reading in community, you'll find prompts aimed at fostering open, safe conversations that encourage shared learning, mutual support, and authentic connection—bringing Scripture and experience alive in relationship with others.

### **Action Step**

Each chapter closes with a manageable, tangible next step—an invitation to take key insights into your daily life through intentional choices and practices, helping move wisdom from theory into lived reality.

### **Prayer Focus**

The journey is one of spiritual formation, supported by prayer. Prayers provided help center your heart, invite the Spirit's work, and sustain growth through trials and breakthroughs alike.

### **Further Study**

For those longing to go deeper, additional Scriptures and resources accompany each chapter, offering rich avenues for extended study and reflection. I suggest you write out the verses in the space provided.

Expect a safe and honest space where your trust in God can be explored with openness and grace. You'll be invited to move from

striving to resting, from false supports to genuine intimacy with Jesus, and from isolation into supportive community. This is not a quick fix but a steady journey of transformation—sometimes slow, always worthwhile.

As you read and pray through this book, may you discover the life-changing power of being anchored and secure in Jesus through all of life's challenges.



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# Introduction

What if the most spiritual thing you could do today was to tell Jesus the truth?

If this book is in your hands, maybe you find yourself longing for something beyond religious performance or spiritual striving. Perhaps you have tried to be “good enough,” or to muster trust on your own, only to find yourself running in circles—sometimes even running away from Jesus rather than toward Him. It took me a while to find the confidence to write this book because I’ve been dealing with deep insecurities and I am not interested in passing off simple answers to confounding questions. Recently Jesus has been inviting me deeper to fly to Him for refuge like a warrior escaping the onslaught into the door of a fortified tower. I’m starting to enjoy this calm secure space with Jesus and I want to set you on the pathway as well.

Here’s the good news: Jesus isn’t asking you to pretend.

In fact, if you don’t trust Him right now, the best place to start is simply telling Him so. He’s not threatened by your honesty. He already knows the places you run when life gets shaky—the places you hide out, the patterns of self-soothing that don’t seem to work, the old

wounds that make trust feel risky. Jesus welcomes your real self, not your best performance.

This book is an invitation to journey from insecurity to secure attachment, from striving to abiding, from idols to intimacy. Along the way, we will explore the wisdom of Scripture, insights from attachment theory, and practical steps of prayerful discipleship. You will find stories, honest questions, and simple practices designed to help you build a life anchored in Jesus—no matter where you are starting from.

Take a deep breath. Bring your doubts, your fears, your hopes, your failures. Let's ask Jesus together:

“Where am I running? What am I leaning on? And how can I learn to trust You more?”

You don't have to pretend. You just have to begin.

## **What to Expect on This Journey**

- *A Safe Place to Be Honest*: This is an invitation to bring your whole self—fear, doubt, and all—into the light of Jesus' love.
- *Scripture and Science*: We will weave biblical truth with insights from attachment theory to understand how our hearts connect with God.
- *Practical Steps*: Each chapter offers reflective questions, prayer prompts, and simple actions to help you grow in trust and freedom.

- *A Path from Striving to Resting*: Learn how to move from performance-driven faith to a secure, abiding relationship with Jesus.
- *Community and Compassion*: Discover the power of shared journeys and how to support others as you grow together

## Starting the Journey

This is not a quick fix or a checklist. It's a transformational journey—sometimes slow, sometimes challenging, always worth it. Whether you're weary, curious, or longing for deeper connection, this book is for you.

As we walk this path together, keep asking yourself:

- Am I running toward Jesus, or away?
- What false supports am I leaning on?
- Could returning to Jesus actually feel like coming home?

Let's begin this journey—together.

# Chapter One

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## Running for Refuge

The thunderstorm has just passed, and the sky is clearing above. But when the rain began, Heather and I were about a hundred yards from the house where, as I write, we are staying in a village in Uganda with Isaac and Rachel. A few thick drops warned us before the downpour. When Isaac remembered the laundry hanging out to dry, it was all the urging I needed to pick up the pace. Isaac and I raced to the clotheslines and barely made it to the house, dodging sheets of rain that soaked the back of our shirts as we bent over to protect the clothes.

We've all experienced that frantic dash for shelter—the scramble for safety as thunder rumbles and lightning flashes. Storms can be frightening, even dangerous. During the very next storm, I was standing at the window when lightning struck that side of the house; I jumped like a startled squirrel.

There's an unforgettable scene in the Gospels: a deadly storm erupts while Jesus and his disciples are in a boat. Waves crash, wind

shrieks, darkness looms—and the One they trust is asleep. The disciples, experienced in rough seas, are panicked (see Mark 4:35-41). They rouse Jesus: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” But after He calms the winds and waves with a command, something more unnerving settles in: “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’”

Their greatest fear shifted—from the chaos outside, to the holy authority within their boat. Sometimes, our need for refuge isn’t just about escaping the storm, but about encountering the unsettling security found in Jesus Himself. Real safety is not the absence of trouble, but abiding with the One who holds power over every storm—sometimes in ways that unsettle our assumptions and deepen our trust.

When the ground shakes and threatens to give way beneath us, when storms rage and the seas roar, our first instincts kick in. We seek refuge, a fastening point, something to cling to. Psychologists tell us that from early childhood, we develop what are called “attachment patterns”—deeply wired responses that guide us toward people, places, or behaviors that provide comfort or a sense of control.

It’s in crisis that these patterns show themselves. Whether formed in childhood, molded by recent experiences, or reinforced by habits we don’t even notice, we all have our “go-to” comforts and refuges—even when those supports barely hold up.

And, let’s be honest, we often run to things like food, our phones, relationships, or work. They may look innocent, maybe even positive, but sometimes they are just distractions—false refuges that keep us distant from the true source of our peace.

Do you actually think of Jesus as your ever-present refuge and strength?

Israel’s story is full of invitations to trust God as fortress—a safe place when the world trembles, when chaos reigns. The psalmists

painted this scene: earth shaking, mountains falling, seas roaring—yet God, steady as bedrock.

One verse caught me this morning:

*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion; it cannot be upended and will endure forever. — Psalm 125:1*

That's stability. What does that look like for you? For me, I learned it the hard way when my 18-year-old daughter died suddenly. In the quake of loss, I discovered the value of decades built on saying "yes" to Jesus—choosing to trust, to obey, to root myself in His way. Psalm 125 offers this stability to those who walk in alignment with Him. It's a trust that keeps saying "yes" to Him. That daily obedience, repeated in a thousand small decisions, pays dividends when the ground really shakes.

Jesus put it like this:

*Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. — Matthew 7:24*

When storms comes—and they will—trust doesn't magically appear. It grows through practice, rooted in love, forgiveness, and daily steps of obedience. Obedience isn't about earning God's favor; it's about learning to align ourselves with a reality stronger than any storm—His kingdom reality. Over time, that alignment builds a trust that just can't be moved.

Let's anchor ourselves in these promises:

## Scripture Focus

*God is our strong refuge; he is truly our helper in times of trouble. For this reason we do not fear when the earth shakes, and the mountains tumble into the depths of the sea, when its waves crash and foam, and the mountains shake before the surging sea. — Psalm 46:1–3*

*[Jesus says] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.  
— Matthew 11:28–30*

Maybe “refuge” or “yoke” aren’t words we use every day—but you know what it’s like to run for cover when trouble hits. In farming, a yoke links a younger, learning animal to an older, steady one. In Jesus’ words, it’s the invitation to apprenticeship, trust, and soul-rest; to let someone more experienced show you the ropes.

Do you know anyone who lives this way, truly rooted and steady? What’s different about their life? What seems unreachable about it for you?

## Our Default Attachments

Science echoes what Scripture says: we're wired for attachment, and the endless pings and notifications of modern life train us to seek comfort in quick fixes—"hits" of connection that rarely satisfy. If you are like me, you mindlessly reach for a snack or your phone without really thinking about it. I find myself scrolling through social media for a minute before even realizing why I am there.

Am I running from stillness? Is there an invitation waiting in the silence?

Sometimes in our digital lives we reach to movies and music to fill the silence in our lives. Psychologists have found that today's constant digital notifications—buzzes, pings, phantom vibrations—trigger real dopamine surges, training our brains to seek "hits" of perceived connection or comfort.

But what's underneath those automatic grabs for distraction?

There's a simple tool called HALT—Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired—a way to check beneath our impulses and ask what's really stirring in our hearts. When comfort cravings rise, when old familiar attachments start tugging, pause and ask: Am I Hungry? Angry? Lonely? Tired? These aren't moments to bury in guilt or shame; they are signals—gentle invitations—to notice where healing might begin. Psychologists and counselors use HALT to help people recognize their most vulnerable states, but as followers of Jesus, we discover it's also a holy invitation. In the depths of hunger, anger, loneliness, and exhaustion, this is right where Jesus leans in with compassion—not to scold or scorn, but to steady and anchor us with His presence.

Imagine what could happen if, instead of numbing or escaping, we brought our hunger, our anger, our loneliness, or our

tiredness honestly to Jesus. What if, as those daily default attachments—food, entertainment, busyness, even well-intentioned spiritual routines—beckon us for comfort, we chose to offer Him our true ache and longing? This is behind practices of fasting for me; intentionally training myself to reach for Jesus when the hunger pang strikes. Again and again, Scripture invites us out of hiding: God doesn't want to be our last desperate hope but our refuge in every storm. Real trust grows not from pretending we're strong, but by honestly confessing what's aching—this is the soil where attachment to Jesus deepens.

Often, that silent ache at the center of our pain feels unbearable, especially when God seems distant. Sometimes, deep disappointments settle in and quietly shape us. Maybe you find yourself drifting from connection with Jesus—not out of intention, but because disappointment has dulled your reach for Him. Trust is always relational, a living bond. If reaching for Jesus feels hard, maybe it's because at some point, when you cried out, He didn't seem near.

Yet even in that silence, Jesus's invitation remains. What if, in the quiet, instead of running, you simply lingered and asked: Could Jesus be waiting for me here, right where my words ran dry? Is there a deeper healing He wants to begin, right in the places I stopped crying out?

Let this be a gentle turning point—an invitation to begin again, bringing your honest hunger, anger, loneliness, and tiredness right into the presence of the One who never pulls away.

Scientific studies paint the picture clearly. After communism fell in Romania, the world got a view into some state run orphanages. The journalists witnessed row after row of cribs—babies lying in a hollow silence. Their needs hadn't been met; instead, their cries went unanswered so often that they learned not to call out at all. Some children spent days alone, staring at their own hands for stimulation,

rocking their small bodies for what little comfort they could create. The lack of nurturing care didn't just touch their mood—it shaped their minds and bodies, leaving brains smaller and hearts slow to trust, even years later in loving families.

Many of these children grew up carrying invisible wounds—the deep ache of spiritual and emotional detachment, echoing words we see in Scripture:

*I am forgotten, like a dead man no one thinks about; I am regarded as worthless, like a broken jar. — Psalm 31:12*

“Why are you silent, Lord? Smile on me!” The human heart is marked by a longing for refuge—and a fear of being left behind. Sometimes, disappointment or absence carves such deep patterns in us that we stop reaching for comfort or connection at all.

But what if, in the silence, something sacred could be found? What if Jesus, unlike any failed source of comfort, is waiting for us right where we stopped crying out—ready to receive our hunger, anger, loneliness, and exhaustion, and anchor us in His unshakeable refuge?

These wounds run through many lives, but they don't have the final word. Scripture assures us that God is both our refuge and our healer—the steady shelter our hearts have always longed for.

## **Practical Application**

Next time you feel the urge to reach for comfort—or to tune out the world—pause and pray:

*“Jesus, where are You in this moment? Help me notice what I’m reaching for, and give me the courage to turn to You instead.”*

I invite you to experiment with a brief digital fast this week. Pick some times during the week where you give up the internet or other digital distractions. Notice what stirs in you when the distractions fall away.

- Where do I instinctively turn when I’m stressed, anxious, or afraid?
- What “refuges” do I notice—both obvious and hidden?

Try pausing in those moments to ask simply:

- “Jesus, where are You here? What am I really seeking?”
- Invite His presence to meet You right there.

## **Journaling Prompt**

- “In moments of stress, where do I run first?”
- “Are there patterns about my responses that emerge over time?”
- “What prayers do I want to offer, asking for courage to turn to Jesus as my first refuge?”

## Reflection Questions

- Recall the last time you felt “caught in a storm.” Where did you instinctively turn first?
- What does your automatic response reveal about your sense of security or trust in God?
- What patterns—big or small—point to attachments or refuges in your life?

## Group Discussion

If reading in community, share a recent “storm dash” story. What did you learn about your reflexes or attachments? How can your group encourage one another to run to Jesus first?

## Action Step

This week, notice your reflexes. When stress or discomfort hits, pause: *Am I running to Jesus, or to something else?*

Write down what you discover. If comfortable, share your journal with a trusted friend or group.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for being my true refuge and shelter in every storm. I confess that at times I have stopped running to You, seeking comfort in other places that cannot hold me steady. In my moments of fear, anxiety, and stress, Jesus, meet me there—calm my racing heart and draw me back to Your unwavering peace. Help me to turn to You first, not as a last resort but as my constant safe place. Teach me to trust deeply in Your presence, even when my fears feel overwhelming. Spirit, please illuminate the hidden attachments and distractions that keep me distant from You. Give me the courage to face these honestly and release them into Your healing hands. Mold my heart to rely fully on Your strength and guidance each day. Remind me that I do not have to pretend or perform—I only need to begin again, moment by moment, in honest dependence on Jesus. Amen*

You don't have to pretend. You just have to begin. Let this be your honest starting point on the journey toward secure attachment to Jesus. As you begin to notice where you run for refuge, the next step is to explore what it means to run intentionally to Jesus—our true sanctuary and strength.

## Further Study

- Psalm 91:1–4: God as shelter and deliverer
- Isaiah 43:1–3: God's presence in the rough waters

- Hebrews 4:14–16: Confidence to approach the throne of grace

# Chapter Two

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## Running to Jesus

The first African rain I experienced was at age 19, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. We watched as a warm rain marched up the street toward the house where I was outside playing with the neighbor kids. Being from Washington State, I am used to rain but this was a new category. It was like a wall moving steadily toward me. We all gave each other curious glances and just decided to enjoy it. We played and splashed and even showered in the roof downspout.

Think for a minute of the way water runs off a dirt road. The storms have left their mark on the African roads because that kind of downpour leaves deep ruts in the dirt road. What are the deep pathways in your life that show how you deal with storms? Do you have reinforced drainage or does your life feel like a muddled mess of reactions from the run off? When a storm comes, I want that kind of confidence to play in the rain, don't you?

But, do we really expect that kind of confidence to spring up from ourselves when faced with something that triggers a response? You and I have a record of dealing poorly with life's circumstances and that makes us less hopeful to run to ourselves for our confidence. I know

the ruts in my road, do you know yours? Self-confidence is good to a point but I want to develop God-confidence.

Maybe your ruts are from childhood, maybe a recent setback, or a recurring adult habit. Did you spend some time in the last chapter reflecting on the default refuge you run to that may have left your road rutted and susceptible to an impasse during the next storm?

About sixteen years ago, I was leading teens at a conference, and on a break at a shopping mall, my brother called: my mom was going into emergency surgery, bleeding profusely. She was on the heart transplant waiting list; now a procedure had punctured a major vessel. She was three hours away. I felt helpless and rattled. My first thought was, “I need an Iced Venti Caramel Macchiato... and to pray.” In that order.

It didn’t take much reflection to see my priorities needed adjustment. Over that delicious dessert beverage, I worked it out with Jesus: I wanted Him to be my first refuge, not coffee— and then, of course, coffee.

We were reminded in chapter 1 that life often draws us toward instant comforts and habitual escapes. We often run toward what’s familiar and tangible instead of simply bringing our needs to Jesus. Social science has identified the times when we’re likely to reach for something mindlessly. When we’re hungry, angry, lonely, tired (HALT). There are more triggers to be sure. Anger for instance is a secondary emotion. Often we get angry when we get pressured, attacked, disregarded, or hurt. We are often irritated by life’s little delays and experience our plans being frustrated often. So when the going gets tough, the one anchored in Jesus knows where to run.

One verse stands out to me today:

*The name of the LORD is like a strong tower; the righteous person runs to it and is set safely on high. — Proverbs 18:10*

This verse beautifully captures both the character of God and the response He invites from us. A strong tower is a place of safety, refuge, and protection. In ancient times, when enemies came upon a city, a strong tower was a place where people could flee and find shelter that was secure from attack. God's name—more than just a label, His nature and reputation—is that refuge.

The "righteous" here are not perfect people but those who live in "right" relationship with God, who trust Him deeply. These "righteous" are rightly aligned with God and seek to live out His purposes. Their response to fear, trouble, or threat is to run—not hesitate or question, but run—into the strong tower of God's presence. The salvation they find is not just rescue from danger, but the wholeness and peace that come from dwelling securely in God's protection.

Meditating on this proverb sent my mind to the blind beggar Bartimaeus's cry from the Gospels:

*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! — Mark 10:47*

Here is a raw, urgent plea that the rest of the people scolded him for. The beggar recognizes Jesus as the Messiah—the promised Savior, the one who embodies the strong tower. "Son of David" ties Jesus back to God's covenant promises, signaling that in Him, the refuge, the strong tower, is fully revealed. We see that what God desires most isn't composure, but a running, honest heart that trusts Him enough to cry out.

The beggar's cry is also deeply instructive for us. It's not a call from those who think they can save themselves or have it all together, but from those who know they need mercy. Like the righteous running to the LORD in Proverbs, the beggar runs to Jesus in trust, acknowledging that only He can save.

As we meditate on these images, what does it feel like to run into that strong tower in our daily lives? What barriers remain that keep you from turning fully to God's refuge when fear or need strikes? And how is our own cry for mercy an invitation to trust in Jesus—not just as a distant Savior, but as the very place where we find safety and salvation?

In our brokenness, in our moments of desperation and daily struggles, we can lean into this promise: the name of the LORD is our strong tower, and when we run to Him—like the beggar crying out to Jesus—we are saved.

## Scripture Focus

*The river's channels bring joy to the city of God, the special, holy dwelling place of the sovereign One. God lives within it, it cannot be moved. God rescues it at the break of dawn. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms are overthrown. God gives a shout, the earth dissolves. The LORD who commands armies is on our side! The God of Jacob is our protector! — Psalm 46:4–7*

Look next at a fascinating prophetic rant against the evils of Assyria and its capital Ninevah. We find that Yahweh is in the storm and

whirlwind with dark storm clouds against his enemies. Tucked in the middle is a promise for those who have pledged our loyalty to Yahweh by allegiance to Jesus.

*No one can withstand his indignation! No one can resist his fierce anger! His wrath is poured out like volcanic fire, boulders are broken up as he approaches. The LORD is good— indeed, he is a fortress in time of distress, and he protects those who seek refuge in him. But with an overwhelming flood he will make a complete end of Nineveh; he will drive his enemies into darkness.*

— Nahum 1:6-8

Who would dare approach Yahweh's throne? Are you interesting in testing out the volcanic consuming fire? However, if Jesus stands in the gap as your High Priest you might come boldly in the midst of any circumstance, even your own sinfulness.

*Therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help. — Hebrews 4:14-16*

The throne is not far away. Because of Jesus—our strong tower, our high priest—we find we're already "seated with Christ in the

heavenlies” (Ephesians 2:6). Access is nearby. The invitation is always open.

## Running to Jesus as Sanctuary

God’s invitation isn’t only to STOP running to false refuges—it is to actively run to Him. Jesus offers not just a distant shelter, but a personal sanctuary; He invites us to rest, stay, and be with Him. In the ancient world, hospitality meant true safety for vulnerable travelers and exiles. Jesus’ welcome is even greater: He invites us to move beyond “dropping by” with quick prayers or Sunday attendance, urging us to come in and truly stay—to trust Him with our burdens and rest in His presence.

Sometimes, our independence or pride tempts us to settle for a surface relationship (“just stopping by”). Jesus gently calls: “Come in. Stay as long as you need. Learn My heart and bring your real self fully into My care.”

## Practical Application

### Four Practices for Running to Jesus

- **Prayer:** When stress or temptation hits, pause and talk honestly to Jesus about what you feel and really need.
- **Community:** Reach out to a friend or trusted group. Don’t carry burdens alone—Jesus often comes to us through others.

- **Journaling:** Write down anxieties or temptations, then “gospel” your thoughts—remind yourself of God’s faithfulness and promises.
- **Gratitude:** List three blessings, even on hard days. Gratitude shifts your perspective and opens your heart to God.

Try this: Next time you feel tempted to seek comfort in entertainment or distractions, instead “stay” awhile with Jesus. Sit quietly, breathe, read Psalm 27:1 or John 7:37 or Matthew 11:28–30, and ask Him, “What do You want to give me right now?”

### Journaling Prompt

- Reflect on what draws you away from staying with Jesus?
- Write a prayer asking Him to show you what you’re missing if you avoid His invitation for true rest.

### Reflection Questions

- Which practice—prayer, community, journaling, gratitude—is easiest for you? Which is hardest?

- What has kept you from coming to Jesus as your first refuge? Is it independence, fear, disappointment, or something else?
  
- When was the last time you felt truly “at home” in God’s presence?

## **Group Discussion**

If reading in community, share a story of a time you reached for comfort instead of Jesus. What happened? How can your group encourage one another to press deeper into relationship with Christ?

## **Action Step**

This week, intentionally replace a comfort-seeking reflex with Jesus’ invitation—whether by prayer, meeting with another, or choosing silence over distraction. Pick a practice above and live it out. Write down your experience and, if willing, share it with a trusted friend or group.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for being my true refuge and strong tower in every storm. When life's challenges come like heavy rain, help me to find confidence not in my own strength but in Your steadfast presence. Teach me to run to You first, turning away from the false comforts and quick fixes that leave my heart restless and uncertain. Jesus, be my steady sanctuary where I can rest and find peace. Help me embrace Your gentleness and receive Your loving care, even when fear or weariness threaten to overwhelm me. May I learn to play with joy in the midst of life's storms, anchored deeply in Your unfailing love. Spirit, open my heart to new rhythms of trust, welcome, and gratitude. Reveal any hidden places where I lean on anything less than You, and give me courage to let go and cling to You alone. Empower me to live rooted in Your hope, becoming a harbor of peace and strength for others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Having begun running to Jesus, it's time to examine the "fortresses" we instinctively build and ask whether they truly hold us secure or lead us astray.

## Further Study

- Psalm 23:1–3—Shepherd's care and provision
- Isaiah 12:2–3—Joyfully drawing water from salvation's wells

- John 7:37–39—Jesus as the source of living water

# Chapter Three

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## Splintered Supports

As a child, one of the greatest joys is building forts out of blankets and pillows. Crawling inside with a flashlight, a book, or a stack of toys, you felt completely safe. I didn't have words for it then, but I was doing what we all do—you and I were made to seek shelter.

That longing for safety never disappears; it just grows up with us. Instead of blanket forts, our adult fortresses might be bank accounts, busy schedules, controlling habits, or comforting rituals. They are our “fortresses,” the spaces (real or imagined) that help us feel secure when life feels uncertain.

Most of these are born from real need, there is no shame in that, and they can give us a sense of security and control. But here's the hard truth: a safe place can become dangerous when it shifts from being an expression of God's refuge to a substitute for it.

## When Comfort Turns into a Crutch

Food is one of God's delightful gifts—intended for joy, celebration, and fellowship. Yet it can easily morph into a way to bury pain rather than bring wholeness. I have found myself just munching through a chocolate bar like a starving racoon only to remember the point was to savor it, not because I needed it in my belly! The pleasure of savoring chocolate as a gift from the Creator is one thing; eating chocolate in secret to numb anxiety is something else entirely. That's not restoration—it's escape.

Shopping can also begin as a good and honorable activity—a way to provide for our family's needs. But when the “thrill of the hunt” becomes the way we cope with emptiness, or when new purchases prop up our sense of worth, we cross into dangerous territory where the bill—financial and spiritual—eventually comes due.

The underlying issue is not just behavior—it's *trust*. Who's the real Provider? Where's the real refuge? In both these cases, the better posture is to do whatever it is as unto the Lord. Feast as one under His care. Provide for your household knowing your true source is the One who owns it all.

## Scripture Focus

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own estimation; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. This will bring healing to*

*your body, and refreshment to your inner self. Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled completely, and your vats will overflow with new wine. — Proverbs 3:5-10*

*Look, you must be trusting in Egypt, that splintered reed staff. If someone leans on it for support, it punctures his hand and wounds him. That is what Pharaoh king of Egypt does to all who trust in him! — Isaiah 36:6*

*Some trust in chariots and others in horses, but we depend on the LORD our God. They will fall down, but we will stand firm. — Psalm 20:7-8*

*The LORD says, “I will put a curse on people who trust in mere human beings, who depend on mere flesh and blood for their strength, and whose hearts have turned away from the LORD. They will be like a shrub in the desert. They will not experience good things even when they happen. It will be as though they were growing in the desert, in a salt land where no one can live. My blessing is on those people who trust in me, who put their confidence in me. They will be like a tree planted near a stream whose roots spread out toward the water. It*

*has nothing to fear when the heat comes. Its leaves are always green. It has no need to be concerned in a year of drought. It does not stop bearing fruit. — Jeremiah 17:5-8*

Taken together, these passages paint a consistent picture: trusting in anything other than God is both dangerous and ultimately disappointing. The metaphors shift — a splintered reed, war horses, a stunted desert shrub — but the truth remains the same: security apart from Him is an illusion. Sometimes what we trust most ends up failing us and leaves a mark that lingers. It’s a picture worth returning to: *What do I really lean on when life gets hard?* Jesus offers a refuge, a defense, a fortress that will not fail and won’t leave us with splinters.

## **Identifying Damaging Supports**

For generations, Egypt was both oppressor and occasional ally to Israel — a symbol of worldly power and military security. Tempting in the moment, but never faithful in the long run. Israel’s history shows what often happens to us: when pressure comes, we reflexively reach for the familiar, the seemingly powerful, the quick fix. Yet God warns that these “Egyptys” are false supports — they will fail us and may even wound us in the process.

In Isaiah’s image, Egypt is that cracked cane that injures the hand that leans on it. Psalm 20 contrasts the might of armies with the far greater strength found in God’s name. Jeremiah draws the line sharply: those who trust in human strength find barrenness; those who trust in the Lord put down roots that never wither.

These warnings are not just ancient history. Our modern “Egyptys” may be material security, relationships, habits of control, achieve-

ments, or even self-reliance. They can be visible, or buried deep. And like splinters in the hand, they can leave pain that outlasts the crisis.

True security comes only from trusting in God — a refuge that is unshakable, living, and good. Leaning on anything else will, in the end, leave us empty, restless, or hurt. And often, our instinct to run to these familiar but unreliable supports is shaped by how we first learned to seek safety and connection. These deep-rooted patterns, known as attachment styles, profoundly shape how we relate to people — and to God. Understanding them is the next step toward discovering true, lasting security.

## **Practical Application**

### **Identify Your “Egypt”**

- Set aside a quiet moment. Ask, “What do I lean on when life gets hard? Where do I turn for quick comfort or control?”
- Name both the visible (habits, people, distractions) and invisible (approval, status, self-reliance) supports.

### **Splinter Inventory**

- Notice: Has leaning on these old supports left behind pain, anxiety, or regret?

- Invite Jesus into your memories: “Are there still splinters—old wounds or unfinished business—keeping me from deeper reliance on you?”

### **Practice: Honest Prayer**

- Next time you feel yourself reaching for a “splintered reed,” pause and pray:
  - “God, help me see what I’m trusting in right now. Give me courage to trust you instead.”

### **Journaling Prompt**

- Write about a time when a support you trusted gave way. How did that experience shape your trust in God, or your posture toward others?
  
- What “splinters” might still be causing pain, and what would it mean to invite Jesus to start the work of healing?

## Reflection Questions

- What have been the most visible “splintered reeds” in your life—supports that have let you down or even caused harm?
- Why do we keep returning to false supports, even when we know they’re not truly reliable?
- In this season, what would it look like for you to lean the full weight of your trust on God?

## Group Exercise

- With your group, share a story of when a false support failed you. What did you learn about yourself? Where might God be inviting you to lean on Him instead?
- How can your group create space to encourage, pray, or help each other let go and lean more on Christ?

## Action Step

This week, watch for moments when you’re tempted to reach for an old “Egypt.” When you notice it, pause, pray honestly, and

choose—even in a small way—to trust Jesus instead. Consider telling a friend or writing down what you notice.

## **Prayer Focus**

*Father, reveal to me the false supports I lean on in times of fear and uncertainty. Jesus, be my true refuge and steady foundation when I feel weak or tempted by shortcuts. Holy Spirit, give me the courage to confess and release every attachment that keeps me from trusting You fully. Help me to find my security in Your faithful care alone, rooted like a tree by living waters, bearing lasting fruit through Your grace. Strengthen me to walk forward with honesty, courage, and deep trust in Your unfailing love. Amen.*

Recognizing these false supports invites us deeper into understanding how our early patterns shape our trust and attachment with God.

## **Further Study**

- Isaiah 26:3 — The offer of perfected peace
- Deuteronomy 31:6—The LORD will never leave nor forsake you.
- Psalm 115:4–11—The emptiness and danger of idols

# Chapter Four

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## Expecting Jesus

As a child and into my teen years, every day when I came home from school, I knew what to expect. Sure, it meant homework and chores—life on a small farm always had plenty of work waiting—but what really marked my return was the welcome. Our mom greeted us as if our arrival mattered. I never questioned it; her warmth was a given. My sister reports that once in High School she came home and Mom wasn't there and she was so disappointed. ONCE!?! I didn't know then how rare that sense of stability and delight could be. Now, whenever someone walks into my home—whether they knock politely or just walk in—I instinctively greet them with my own version of that gift: “Welcome Home.”

Not everyone grows up with that kind of constancy. Despite the very best efforts of parents, some kids push open a door to an empty house every afternoon and come to know that absence as normal. Others live in quiet dread, wondering what mood might come through the door. Sometimes the unpredictability is mild, sometimes it's crushing—but either way, it teaches a lesson: watch. Guard yourself. Don't expect too much. It shapes your sense of trust—who is safe, and if anyone really is.

By now you've probably gathered: trust is deeply relational. It isn't built overnight; it grows slowly, brick by brick, through consistent presence—and it can crumble quickly when that presence is withdrawn.

Take a moment: recall a memory from your own childhood or early walk with God. Maybe you came home from school seeking comfort or connection—was it there, reliable and steady? Or was it missing, inconsistent, uncertain? Now fast-forward to grown-up life: when trouble hits, do you find it easy or hard to believe God is near? Could those early patterns—those “homecomings” of the past—still be shaping your openness or wariness toward Him today?

## Scripture Focus

*You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar... Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. — Psalm 139:1–3, 23–24*

*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast? Even if she could, I would not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. — Isaiah 49:15–16*

*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. — John 14:18*

*Indeed I am composed and quiet, like a young child carried by its mother; I am content like the young child I carry. O Israel, hope in the LORD now and forevermore! — Psalm 131:2-3*

## **The Emotional Heart of Trust**

Taken together, these verses form a movement—a story arc God is writing over our lives: being *fully known* (Psalm 139), *never forgotten* (Isaiah 49), *adopted as His own* (John 14), and finally *resting securely* in His presence like a child with its mother (Psalm 131).

They reveal the deep personal heart of God toward us: He knows every detail of our lives; He is so committed that He has engraved us on His hands; He promises never to leave us as orphans. The invitation is clear—to trust in a presence that is unwavering and intimate.

Psalm 131 in particular gives us a living picture of *secure attachment*: a soul that is calm and quiet, free from demanding or striving, content simply to be with the One who is both Father and Shepherd.

Attachment theory in psychology helps illuminate why this picture resonates so deeply. Our earliest experiences form “blueprints” for trust—shaping how we connect, or avoid connection, in every relationship, including our relationship with God. Some carry anxiety, always fearing abandonment. Others keep their distance, guarded even with the Lord. Still others swing between longing for closeness and fearing it. And yet, Psalm 131 calls us beyond those reflexes into a peace anchored not in circumstances but in the unchanging character of God.

The Trinity models this perfect bond:

- The Father’s steadfast care.
- The Son’s sacrificial, loving presence.
- The Spirit’s constant comfort and help.

Our question, then, is this: *Can you rest like that child—stilled and quieted—in God’s care?* Even if that kind of peace feels foreign or fragile right now, Scripture assures us it is possible and promised.

## **Understanding Attachment Styles in Our Spiritual Life**

These passages we’ve just read give us God’s posture toward us: attentive, unforgetting, and present. He searches us and knows every part. His commitment is deeper than a mother’s bond to her newborn. And Jesus Himself promises, *“I will not leave you as orphans”* (John 14:18).

Attachment theory — a concept from psychology — simply names something Scripture has been illustrating for centuries: our earliest relationships form deep “blueprints” for how we experience trust, safety, and closeness. These blueprints shape how we relate to others and, often without realizing it, how we relate to God.

Below are the four broad attachment patterns often discussed in psychology, reframed in a faith context — with a biblical snapshot for each — so we can see how these patterns might show up in the life of the spirit.

### **Secure Attachment**

You instinctively trust God’s goodness and nearness. You bring both your fears and your joys to Him without hesitation, and you remain

open to His guidance because you believe His heart toward you is good.

- *Biblical picture*: John leaning against Jesus during the Last Supper (John 13:23) — relaxed, close, unafraid to be near.

### **Anxious (Insecure) Attachment**

You long for God's presence but live with a low-grade fear of abandonment. Deep down, you suspect you must work to earn His love or keep His attention. You hunger for reassurance but struggle to rest in it when it's offered.

- *Biblical picture*: Peter in the footwashing scene (John 13:6–9) — at first resisting intimacy, then swinging to “wash all of me!” when reassured; a heart that loves deeply but fears losing connection.

### **Avoidant Attachment**

You prize self-reliance and keep emotional and spiritual distance. You may read God's promises in Scripture but find it hard to really *lean* on them. Trust feels risky, and you'd rather handle life yourself than risk being let down.

- *Biblical picture*: The rich young ruler (Mark 10:17–22) — longing for eternal life but unable to step into deeper trust, choosing the safe distance of possessions over relational surrender.

### **Disorganized (Chaotic) Attachment**

You feel pulled in two directions — longing for closeness yet fearing rejection or harm. You may approach God with hope, then retreat in confusion, unsure how He will respond.

- *Biblical picture*: Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:18–19) — trembling before God's glory, drawn to His presence but

begging Moses to stand between them out of fear.

## The Good News

None of these patterns is fixed. They are not your identity; they are simply the *starting point* of your trust story. God's purpose in salvation is not only to rescue us from sin but to restore us into an intimate, trusting relationship with Himself. Salvation bridges the gap, heals the divide, and reconciles us to our Creator.

In John 17, Jesus prays that we would be one with Him and the Father — a prayer for deep connection, unity, and love. For many of us, however, intimacy feels risky or unfamiliar. Our life experiences — whether instability, absence, or rejection — have trained us to guard our hearts. But in the presence of God, those defenses can finally come down.

In Christ, God offers a secure and unshakable relationship where your worth, safety, and belonging are never in question. The gospel offers more than forgiveness; it rebuilds the very foundation of how we relate — steadily rewiring our default attachments toward security, trust, and joy.

When we learn to trust Him, our relationship with the Trinity looks like this:

- **The Father** provides stability, protection, and care.
- **The Son** embodies sacrificial love and intimate friendship.
- **The Spirit** is our constant Comforter and Helper, even in our weakest or most avoidant moments.

Through daily communion with the Triune God, defensive walls begin to crumble, fear of abandonment diminishes, and hearts that once hid or hustled to be loved can finally rest secure. If God offers us this secure attachment in Christ, the next question is: how do we begin living from it — especially if we've had years of running on our old patterns of trust? That's where a few simple, intentional steps can start to retrain our hearts.

### **First Steps Toward Secure Attachment with God**

- **If you tend toward Secure Attachment** – Cultivate gratitude in prayer. Thank God daily for His presence, and let that trust overflow in intercession for others.
- **If you tend toward Anxious Attachment** – Meditate daily on Scriptures of God's steadfast presence (e.g., Hebrews 13:5, Isaiah 41:10). Breathe and imagine resting in His arms as in Psalm 131.
- **If you tend toward Avoidant Attachment** – Set aside short, regular times just to be still before God without “producing” anything. Let yourself feel His care without rushing away.
- **If you tend toward Disorganized Attachment** – Journal conversations with God about your fears and longings, pairing each with a promise from Scripture. Invite Him to show you His consistent heart toward you.

## Journaling Prompt

Write about a moment you felt God's nearness. What made it possible to receive it? Then write about a moment you felt distant or hesitant with Him. Ask Him to speak into each memory, and write what you sense.

## Reflection Questions

- Which attachment style do I most resonate with right now?
- How have my early patterns of trust shaped my relationship with God?
- What is one way God might be inviting me to experience Him as safe and present this week?
- What would it look like to let my guard down a little more with God?

## Group Discussion

- How have early experiences impacted your trust in God?
- Which image of God's nature — Father, Mother-like nurturer, or Spirit Comforter — challenges or encourages you the most?
- How might we walk together into a more secure trust in Him?

## Action Step

This week, take one moment of risk in prayer. Tell God *specifically* where trust feels fragile. Ask Him to write a new chapter in your attachment story. If you feel overwhelmed, invite a Christian counselor or trusted friend into that process. Pick one practice from the “First Steps” list above and commit to it every day this week. Note even subtle changes in how you relate to God and others.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for being my unshakable foundation and refuge in every storm. Your steadfast love and faithfulness sustain me even in trials. Teach me to fully trust You and rest securely in Your care. Jesus, You are my anchor and the source of lasting hope. When I feel overwhelmed,*

*remind me of Your constant presence. Help me remain connected to You daily, resting in Your grace and bearing fruit that honors the Father. Spirit, fill me with Your comfort, courage, and wisdom. Strengthen me to stand firm in faith, overcome doubts, and live anchored in Your truth. Empower me to encourage and support others as a steady source of hope. Amen.*

With this insight into our attachment styles, we are ready to learn what it means to abide deeply in Christ — the source of true life and growth.

## **Further Study**

- John 17 — Jesus’ prayer for unity and intimacy
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Hosea 11 — God’s fatherly and motherly care for His people
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 — God as the “Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”

# Chapter Five

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## Abiding in Christ

**I**n the last chapter, we explored the secure, trusting attachment God invites us into—knowing Him as safe, present, and constant. But this secure connection is not just a resting place; it's the root system for spiritual growth, life, and fruitfulness. Jesus calls this *abiding*—remaining with Him, drawing life from Him, and letting that life overflow to bless others.

I love activity and productivity and efficiency. I'm almost always moving. I often find it challenging to slow down my body and mind enough to really encounter Jesus. If you've ever transplanted vegetable plants or flowerpots, you know that continually uprooting them invites disaster. Jesus gently invites me—and you—to come and stay a while. I'm learning this, slowly. "Lord, have patience with me."

### **The Vine, the Anchor, and the House**

Imagine a grapevine in early spring: new shoots reach toward sunlight, but only those connected to the vine grow lush and bear fruit. Even vibrant branches cut off soon wither.

Picture a ship anchored firmly beneath stormy waves, steady not because the sea is calm, but because the anchor grips deep below.

Then consider a house built on a weak foundation; skilled workers and fine materials mean little if the base won't hold.

These three images—vine, anchor, and house—are woven throughout Scripture to teach abiding in Christ: a daily, rooted relationship that sustains, transforms, and produces lasting fruit for God's kingdom. Several key Scripture passages paint a full picture of abiding.

## Scripture Focus

*Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing. — John 15:4–5*

*[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him. — Colossians 1:15-17*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. — Galatians 5:22-23*

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast, which reaches inside behind the curtain, where Jesus our forerunner entered on our behalf — Hebrews 6:19-20*

*If the Lord does not build a house, then those who build it work in vain. If the Lord does not guard a city, then the watchman stands guard in vain. — Psalm 127:1*

## **The Heart of Abiding**

Taken together, these passages offer a full picture of abiding. John 15 invites us into a living, life-giving union with Christ—like branches on a vine drawing nourishment. Psalm 127 reminds us that no human effort secures lasting life without God building the foundation. Colossians 1 expands the vision of Christ as the one who holds all things together, including our lives. Galatians describes the evidence of abiding: the fruit borne by the Spirit, blessing others and glorifying God's name.

Hebrews 6:19–20 adds a breathtaking dimension to this picture. Our hope—the sustenance of our soul—is the anchor that holds us

firm and secure. But not just any anchor: this anchor is fixed in the heavenly sanctuary, behind the curtain. The earthly temple had a curtain, a veil that that marked out the Most Holy Place. The curtain protected the people from the presence of God in the Old Testament temple. Jesus has gone ahead of us as our forerunner, entering that holy place on our behalf, securing our hope eternally.

This means our abiding is rooted not only in present experience but in heavenly reality. Our connection to Christ is held fast by His priestly intercession and unending ministry before the Father.

## **Abiding Is an Active, Ongoing Relationship**

Abiding is not passive waiting or occasional effort. It is a daily, intentional walk—choosing to turn to Jesus, listen for His voice, receive life, and rest in His love consistently. Like an anchor gripping beneath storms, our faith rests on Christ's eternal presence, not on fluctuating feelings or performance.

## **Trusting the Builder and the Anchor**

Psalm 127's reminder that labor is in vain unless the Lord builds the house calls us to surrender our striving. Like a ship's anchor holding steady against crashing waves, our trust depends not on smooth circumstances but on the One who upholds all things. The anchoring hope described in Hebrews assures us that our stability is anchored in a heaven-secured hope, not shaken by temporary trials.

## **Fruitfulness for Others, Not just Ourselves**

Jesus makes clear that abiding's goal is fruit that remains—love, patience, kindness—that blesses others and glorifies God, not just personal gain or status. The Spirit's fruit reveals the kingdom life flowing through us. This fruit is a gift of the Spirit's work, emerging as we faithfully stay connected and trust Him to grow us. Our role is faithful connection and trust; the Spirit's role is growth and transformation. As we abide, we can expect this fruit to grow—even when we don't see it immediately. We'll explore this more fully in Chapter 8.

### **Practical Application**

- **Set Aside Time Daily**

Dedicate moments each day simply to be with Jesus—through reading Scripture, prayer, or quiet presence. Let these times become rhythms of connection—regular, grace-filled moments with Jesus, not chores or tasks to check off.

- **Pause and Pray**

When you feel yourself striving, distracted, or disconnected during the day, pause and pray, "*Jesus, help me remain in You.*" Don't give into discouragement, this is a journey of discovery.

- **Memorize and Meditate**

Memorize key verses like John 15:4-5 to recall when you face pressure or temptation. Let these truths root you in abiding.

- **Reflect and Respond**

At the end of your day or week, reflect on where you have seen spiritual fruit growing or sensed dryness. Ask Jesus what He invites you toward in those areas.

## **Journaling Prompt**

Write about a recent time you felt deeply connected to Jesus—or conversely, disconnected. What fruit did you notice in those times? What pruning might God be inviting you to embrace so you can abide more fully?

## **Reflection Questions**

- When have you felt most connected or disconnected from Jesus?
- What helps or hinders your abiding in Him?
- How might your daily rhythms change if you lived consciously from connection to the Vine rather than your own effort?

## Group Discussion

Share with your group or trusted friends:

- A time when you found it difficult to remain in Jesus.
- What supports or hinders your spiritual connectedness.
- How can your group encourage one another to stay rooted and fruitful in daily life?

## Action Step

Choose one abiding practice this week—whether prayer, journaling, silent moments, or Scripture memory—and focus on it daily. Resist the urge to strive harder or measure progress; instead, rest in Jesus’ presence regularly and trust Him to nurture growth in you.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, root me deeply in Your unfailing love and steady presence. When life rushes by, help me to slow down and find rest in You, my true home and refuge. Jesus, You are the Vine and I am Your branch. Keep me connected to Your life and help me to abide in You daily, trusting that apart from You I can do nothing. Teach me to rest in Your grace and bear fruit that honors the Father. Holy Spirit, fill me with the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and faithfulness. Teach me daily dependence on You, especially in moments of distraction or struggle.*

*Lord, guide me to create rhythms of connection—times of Scripture, prayer, and quiet worship. When I feel disconnected, remind me to pause*

*and ask for Your help to remain rooted in You. Anchor my soul in Your eternal hope, giving me strength to trust You through every storm. Help me embrace Your pruning hand, growing deeper in love and intimacy with You and others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Rooted in abiding, we can now face the subtle idols and spiritual forces that threaten our connection and learn to guard our hearts wisely.

### **Further Study**

- Psalm 1:1-3 — Those who delight in God are like trees planted by streams of water.
- Philippians 1:6 — Confidence that God will continue the good work He began in us
- Romans 1:18-28 — The consequences of drifting away from God's presence and power

# Chapter Six

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## Hidden Idols

**I**n the last chapter, we saw that abiding in Christ roots us deeply in the Vine, the Anchor, the Firm Foundation. But even this secure connection faces threats—forces that try to loosen our hold and pull out our roots. Sometimes these threats confront us openly, demanding clear allegiance to something other than Jesus. Often, however, they sneak in quietly through the “back door” of the soul—the hidden places where subtle attachments offer us relief from fear and longing but slowly take God’s rightful place. This is idolatry.

### **Walking Through the House of Your Life**

Visualize your life as a grand temple—a holy place designed to reflect God’s presence. Outside, the “front of house” is the ceremonial courtyard, the spaces open to public view, where worship and allegiance are clearly displayed. If there’s an idol here, you know it right away. It might be your career, your social image, your ambition, or other things that clearly vie for your devotion and time. This is where front of house idolatry shows up—externally visible, often celebrated or debated. Most of us who are reading this book would be wary if a

shimmering demon offered us success and power if we would only bow the knee to him.

But just like the temple had secret inner chambers—spaces behind the veil, hidden from sight—so too your soul has a “back of house.” These are the private holy places and shadows where no one but God sees. Here dwell the subtle idols—back of house idolatry. These include the emotional attachments formed as quiet contracts with comfort, control, approval, or avoidance. They masquerade as strengths or coping mechanisms but quietly rival God’s rightful claim on your heart.

For those whose hearts have been shaped by chaotic or disorganized attachments, these hidden rooms may feel like the only places of refuge amid internal confusion and turmoil. Often, we think we’re simply soothing ourselves, seeking relief. But these subtle idols are powerful—forming secret strongholds that sow shame spirals, bondage, and distance from the true Vine.

## **A Word on Prayer: To Whom Are We Speaking?**

One of the ways these hidden idols influence us is by shaping how—and to whom—we bring our need. Before we go further, can I make a crucial point about prayer? I can’t count the number of conversations where I’ve overheard or been part of people saying, “I’m sending good thoughts to the universe for you,” or “Sending prayers your way.” But what does that really mean? Are we casting hopes and pleas out into a vast, unknown void, waiting for some unseen power to pick them up?

Have we forgotten the importance of prayer as a direct, personal communication with God? Or perhaps more urgently, have we forgotten which God we are to pray to?

When you make a call to the general “universe,” how do you know which spiritual being answers? This spiritual roulette is dangerous. One of the core truths of the Christian faith is that prayer is not about sending vague wishes into the ether. It’s about coming before the one true God—the Father, in the name of the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

By praying to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, moved by the Spirit, we connect with the Creator and Sustainer of all things. This connection is specific, powerful, and safe. It’s a covenant relationship, not a random cosmic call.

So, can we agree together? When we pray, let us pray with intention, trust, and authority—praying to the Father in the name of the Son by the Spirit. There is no other place to find true refuge or strength.

## Scripture Focus

*For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to dishonor their bodies among themselves. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

— Romans 1:21–25

*The king uttered these words: “Is this not the great Babylon that I have built for a royal residence by my own mighty strength and for my majestic honor?” While these words were still on the king’s lips, a voice came down from heaven: “It is hereby announced to you, King Nebuchadnezzar, that your kingdom has been removed from you! You will be driven from human society, and you will live with the wild animals. You will be fed grass like oxen, and seven periods of time will pass by for you before you understand that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms and gives them to whomever he wishes.” — Daniel 4:30–32*

*Many of those who had believed came forward, confessing and making their deeds known. Large numbers of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them up in the presence of everyone. When the value of the books was added up, it was found to total fifty thousand silver coins. In this way the word of the Lord continued to grow in power and to prevail. — Acts 19:18–20*

## **Idolatry and Attachment: How They Collide**

These passages reveal the heartbreaking progression of idolatry. At its root in Romans 1 is a refusal to glorify and thank God—a failure

of gratitude that opens the door for false attachments to take root deep in our hearts. These hidden “back of house” idols then shape our thoughts and behaviors without immediate awareness.

Daniel’s account of Nebuchadnezzar exposes prideful self-sufficiency as a public “front of house” manifestation fueled by deeper inner longings for control and recognition—the kind of idolatry that masquerades as strength but leads to downfall. His fall from royal position to disoriented feral exile illustrates the chaos idols sow—a mirror to chaotic/disorganized attachment patterns.

The Book of Acts shows the path to freedom. True deliverance comes when individuals confess their personal idols, break the invisible bonds, and align fully with Jesus. This isn’t just external cleanup—it’s internal transformation.

When we apply attachment theory, a pattern emerges: those with secure attachment are better able to resist idols because of their rooted trust in Christ. Anxious attachments often fuel approval-seeking idols. Avoidant attachments elevate self-reliance into idol status, preferring distance over connection. Disorganized and chaotic attachments drive people toward subtle back-of-house idols that promise relief but perpetuate shame and fear cycles.

You might want to read that last paragraph again as we’re at the heart of the book now.

We have come beyond just slapping down sin and shaming ourselves for being deceived, we’re asking a deeper question: What did these behaviors do for us?

## Front and Back of House Idolatry

- **Front of House Idols:** These are overt, visible allegiances like money, career, relationships, and religious activities that

often displace God publicly. They are easier to identify and challenge.

- **Back of House Idols:** Hidden attachments formed in the quiet rooms of our heart—such as compulsions for control, fear management, approval, or escape—that secretly govern us. Because they often arise from early wounds and disordered attachments, they are harder to detect yet more deeply entrenched.

## **Breaking the Cycle: From Idols to Secure Attachment in Christ**

Idols take advantage of our emotional wounds and disordered desires, but Christ is the healer who restores. Repentance means not only turning from sin but turning *to* God, reclaiming our hearts and rewiring our default attachments toward security in Him.

In Acts 19, the believers who came forward to confess and destroy their idols experienced power and renewal. This pattern of confession, renunciation, and renewed allegiance is the foundation for breaking strongholds and walking in freedom.

## **Spiritual Warfare: Rebuke, Renounce, Reclaim**

Because many idols hide in subtle attachments, the battle is spiritual as much as moral. Our weapons are truth, faith, prayer, Scripture, and the Spirit's power. We must actively rebuke the lies that bind us, renounce false allegiances, and reclaim God's rightful place as Lord of our hearts.

Many people point to the book burning that was done in Acts 19 and assume our job is to burn other people's books and confess their sins — something we're keenly focused on. I am not able to confess your sins and you are not able to confess mine. I can't renounce the hold the enemy has on you, that is your work.

Confession is an act of war—a spiritual rupture with the enemy's hold and an assertion of Christ's authority.

## **Practical Application**

### **Idol Inventory**

- What do I instinctively turn to when fear, shame, or loneliness rise?
  
- Are there “good” things I've quietly made ultimate in my life?
  
- Which hidden attachments—control, approval, avoidance—steer my choices without my full awareness?

### **Scripture Meditation**

Reflect on Romans 1:21–25. Where has ingratitude or hardened heart opened your soul to idolatry?

### **Breaking Allegiances**

Confess any spiritual contracts or agreements placing things above

God. Pray:

*“Jesus, I release everyone and everything into Your loving hands. Break every chain that holds me captive.”*

### **Community & Accountability**

Share an area of struggle with a trusted friend or group. Invite prayer and mutual encouragement focused on personal renewal.

## **Journaling Prompt**

Write about a moment when you recognized an idol controlling your life. How did it take root, and what fear or shame fueled it? Write a prayer surrendering your trust wholly to Christ.

## **Reflection Questions**

- What front and back of house idols appear in your life?
- How do your attachment patterns influence your vulnerability to these idols?
- How can cultivating gratitude help guard your heart this week?

## Group Discussion

- Share ‘back of house’ idols you’ve identified.
- How can your group support one another in renouncing false attachments and embracing secure trust in Jesus?
- What role does daily worship have in guarding your heart against idolatry?

## Action Step

Choose one idol to confront this week. Take a concrete step: confess, release, and replace it with grateful worship.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, expose every hidden allegiance and false refuge within me. Empower me with courage and strength to confront them honestly and walk in freedom. Jesus, break every chain that holds my heart captive. Anchor me deeply in Your love and steady foundation, fully relying on You alone. Spirit, guide me into freedom, leading me to worship You alone with intention and authority. Help me reject false idols and live in secure, joyful trust. Amen.*

With idols exposed, the next chapter unfolds a spiritual rhythm to help us repent, obey, and worship—realigning us daily with Christ’s kingdom.

## Further Development

The roots of these truths about front and back of house idolatry first took shape in my earlier book, *ROW Against the Flow*. There, I introduced the idea of entering the temple of idolatry through both front and back doors—showing how disordered desires lure us into bondage often without our awareness.

If these concepts are new, or if you want a fuller grounding in spiritual warfare practices to expose and break these hidden idols, I encourage you to explore *ROW Against the Flow*. It lays a strong foundation and provides practical tools (Repent, Obey, Worship) to confront both overt and covert idols.

## Further Study

- Colossians 3:1–5 — Setting hearts on things above, putting idols to death
  
- Jeremiah 2:13 — Broken cisterns vs. the fountain of living water
  
- Psalm 115:4–8 — Those who make idols become like them.

# Chapter Seven

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## The R.O.W. Rhythm

As I grew up, I often felt like I was drifting downstream in a canoe—helplessly watching the consequences of my actions and the chaotic debris flowing past me. Looking forward wasn't really an option; I was simply swept along by currents beyond my control. Jesus threw me lifelines—through a stable home, a church family, and mentors—but I struggled to grab the rope. It wasn't until He rescued me and gave me tools to paddle against the currents of the world, my flesh, and the enemy that I began to find real hope.

I own a canoe now, and each year I seek out rivers to paddle. Some stretches carry me peacefully with the flow; others demand focused effort and steady determination to advance. Over time, I've come to respect the rivermen of old—those who didn't simply drift with the current but possessed the strength and skill to paddle upstream, navigating rocks, swift waters, and hidden obstacles. Yesterday, my son Max and I practiced a little upstream paddling in the canoe as we played around chasing Alex in his kayak.

For adventure I want to go downstream with as much speed as possible, but in life I know I have to go against the flow of my culture. Wide is the pathway that leads to destruction, and left alone, we drift.

My life with Jesus is much like a journey upstream. Culture pulls hard, like a swift current pushing me downstream toward lies, distractions, and old patterns of sin. The world's currents are powerful—promising comfort, success, and security if only I fall in line. But Jesus is my guide and strength. He equips me, steady and sure, to paddle against that flow—to resist the pull of culture and the enemy, and to keep moving toward the Kingdom of light.

Navigating against the flow is no casual venture; it requires focus, faith, and the help of a steady guide. I wrestle with tension inside—a pull to stay close to Jesus and a simultaneous pull toward old comforts and familiar habits.

From that wrestling has come a deep realization: spiritually there is no middle ground. If you don't know you are in a battle, you are already losing it. We either row upstream toward God's kingdom and light, or we drift with the current of darkness and death. There is no neutral place to float.

But here's the good news: Jesus has given me a simple, powerful rhythm to help me stay on course—the R.O.W. pathway: Repent, Obey, Worship. This rhythm helps me continually turn back to Him, align my heart with His, and stay tethered amid the currents that threaten to pull me away. For a deeper exploration of this spiritual warfare and how to fight the battle you are already in, see my previous book, *R.O.W. Against the Flow*.

As we face the currents pulling us away from God's kingdom, it's vital to ground ourselves in the truth and power of God's Word. The scriptures that follow remind us both of the spiritual battle we are in and the grace available to realign our hearts as we repent, obey, and

worship — the very rhythm that strengthens our connection to Christ and anchors us in His love.

## Scripture Focus

*For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ. — 2 Corinthians 10:3–5*

*Now when they heard this, they were acutely distressed and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “What should we do, brothers?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” — Acts 2:36–38*

*Create for me a pure heart, O God! Renew a resolute spirit within me! Do not reject me! Do not take your Holy Spirit away from me! Let me again experience the joy of your deliverance! Sustain me by giving me the desire to obey! — Psalm 51:10–12*

*[the Father] delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. — Colossians 1:13-16*

*If you have no desire to worship the LORD, choose today whom you will worship, whether it be the gods whom your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But I and my family will worship the LORD. — Joshua 24:15*

## **Two Kingdoms, No Neutral Territory**

The apostle John writes with urgent clarity about the spiritual reality we inhabit:

*The one who says he resides in God ought himself to walk just as Jesus walked...Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. Do not love the world or the things*

*in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever. — 1 John 2:6, 15-17*

John offers no room for spiritual neutrality or compromise: loving the world and following its ways is incompatible with belonging to God. We've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness *into* the kingdom of light—a decisive move, not a vague option.

We have been rescued, but the pull between these kingdoms remains intense, like trying to row upstream against a strong current.

## **The Necessity of Decisive Allegiance**

Spiritually, "going our own way" is an illusion. Each choice aligns us closer to God or further away. We're either building for God's kingdom or we are working against it. This duality demands a daily choice—to serve God or something else. Joshua challenged the Israelites to choose and in our spiritually complex world we need to remove any attachments to idolatry in all its forms. Whom will you serve?

This ongoing battle includes cultural pulls, selfish desires, and spiritual forces pressing us to settle for lesser lords—success, comfort, control. The enemy plants subtle idols, encouraging compromise.

Only by staying attached to Jesus, rejecting spiritual bondage, and maintaining clear allegiance can we stand firm.

## The R.O.W. Pathway and the Battle for Allegiance

Secure attachment to Christ requires more than awareness—it requires continual realignment through a relational rhythm:

**Repent:** Turn honestly from false refuges, idols, and distractions. Repentance means coming home to Jesus, not spiraling in shame.

**Obey:** Jesus reigns. Submit your will to His Lordship. Obedience is active and Spirit-led. Step out, confess, and choose new paths that root you deeper in Him.

**Worship:** Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Light of the World. Worship dethrones idols and centers your heart on God’s goodness, especially when emotions or circumstances are difficult.

This rhythm is a lifeline amid two kingdoms—light and darkness. Scripture warns there is no middle ground. The enemy longs to lure us back to “splintered reeds” that betray us. Daily practicing R.O.W. keeps you tethered to your true and sure foundation. Repentance is a lifeline and a lifestyle not a one time thing.

## Practical Application

### Practice the R.O.W. Rhythm:

- **Identify:** What old pattern or idol tempts you today?
- **Repent:** Name it and pray, “Jesus, break this attachment and bring me home.”
- **Obey:** Ask God for your next step and take it, no matter how small.

- **Worship:** Praise God—by song, silence, or prayer—declaring your trust anew.

## Journaling Prompt

Recall a recent time you practiced any part of R.O.W. How did it change you? What holds you back from doing it regularly?

## Reflection Questions

- Where is God inviting you to deeper repentance, obedience, or worship?
- Which part of R.O.W. challenges you the most?
- How does worship reshape your heart when old habits resurface?
- What cultural or personal "currents" threaten your allegiance to Christ?

## Group Discussion

Share:

- One area where R.O.W. could bring freedom in your life.
- One act of obedience or worship your group might try this week.
- How can your group encourage and pray for one another in this journey?

## Action Step

This week, commit to intentionally practicing R.O.W. in a struggle or temptation. Journal your experiences and bring them to God in prayer, asking for courage and deeper attachment to Jesus.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, help me to recognize that I cannot sit on the spiritual fence. I have been transferred into Your kingdom of light, and I want to live fully in that truth. Show me any secret compromises or attachments that pull me away from You. Teach me to repent quickly, obey Your gospel, and worship You as the true King of my life. Strengthen me to row against the flow of this world, holding fast to Jesus as my firm foundation. Jesus, help me recognize that I must choose You wholly. I refuse to remain neutral or divided. I repent from anything that pulls me back toward darkness. I declare You as Lord over all, and I trust Your power to keep me in Your light. Help me walk obediently, trusting Your goodness. Spirit, lead me*

*into worship that realigns my heart and sets me free to life fully for You.  
Amen.*

This call to repentance, obedience, and worship is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey of growing deeper in the enjoyment of our security in Jesus. Practicing this faithful rhythm leads naturally into embracing God's pruning work, where growth and fruitfulness truly take shape.

### **Further Study**

- Romans 12:1-2 — Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, renewed mind.
  
- James 1:22-25 — Be doers of the word, not hearers only.
  
- Colossians 3:16-17 — Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you.

# Chapter Eight

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## Fruitfulness

For much of my spiritual life, I tried to always do the right thing. In ministry, there's a lot of pressure to be above reproach, to learn from others' mistakes, and to keep a clean record. I remember Sunday school as a child when my teacher emphasized that the wise person watches others, learns from their mistakes, and avoids them. That's true, as far as it goes—but what I took away was something harsher: *seek perfection so no one can accuse you*. Much of my early ministry was shaped by this mindset—don't mess up, don't give anyone a reason to criticize, because any criticism felt like failure, evidence I needed to work harder, try harder, be better.

One day, sharing this story with a mentor, he said something I'll never forget:

"Aaron, the Gardener is never closer to the vine than when He is pruning it."

That stopped me cold. Had I been avoiding God's pruning all those years? Had my fear-driven perfectionism kept me from intimacy

with Him? Was I content with having just big leafy branches—green, healthy looking on the outside—but empty of real fruit?

Years later I still wrestle with the truth that “*Conflict is the price we pay for intimacy.*” Every time I avoided criticism or conflict, I was stonewalling not only other people but God Himself.

## **Conflict is the Price of Intimacy**

Meaningful relationships inevitably involve conflict—a natural cost of true intimacy. Honest connection exposes vulnerabilities and differences, creating space for deeper bonds and lasting fruit. Avoiding conflict to keep up appearances limits our intimacy with God and others, stunting growth. Embracing conflict means stepping into vulnerability within grace-filled community, opening our hearts to healing and transformation.

Jesus himself embraced this reality. The vine’s branches must sometimes be pruned by the Gardener, even though the process can be painful. Jesus describes pruning as an act of loving care:

*Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. — John 15:2*

The pruning process is evidence of growth and closeness, not rejection. It is the refining work of God’s love, shaping us into maturity.

Yet many of us shrink from the pruning and avoid conflict, favoring the illusion of peace or perfection. We may fall into striving to appear “right” and avoiding the messy truth of our imperfections or differences. This posture, however, limits our intimacy with Jesus and

others. Avoidance of conflict can stunt our growth and starve the soul of the honest relationship that nurtures lasting fruitfulness.

## **Embracing Conflict as Part of Intimacy**

Embracing conflict as part of intimacy means stepping into vulnerability—acknowledging wounds, fears, and differences in a community held together by grace. It invites us to let go of controlling the narrative or blaming others and to open our hearts to healing and transformation. This kind of connection cultivates authentic love, patience, humility, and kindness—the very fruit of the Spirit.

Therefore, welcome the pruning and the conflict as signs of the Gardener’s hand and a pathway into deeper intimacy. Lean into the discomfort and trust that the Spirit is at work, shaping a life that will become truly fruitful and anchored in Christ.

## **The Vine and the Branches: Abiding and Fruitfulness**

Jesus calls us to abide in Him just as branches abide in the vine (John 15:1-2). Our fruitfulness grows entirely out of this connection—apart from Him, we wither. The Father’s work of pruning is not punishment, but a loving way to clear away barriers and fears, making room for the Spirit’s fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)—to grow strong and last.

A branch that resists pruning shrinks not because of God’s rejection, but because it has refused His intimate shaping. The warning here is honest: we can’t bear fruit alone. Our strength, life, and growth come only when we abide—remain—connected to the True Vine.

Jesus invites us into daily, honest attachment. Not hustling or performance, but simple, ongoing trust—a steady dwelling in His presence, drinking deeply from His life.

Pruning isn't about rejection; it's about relationship. The Gardener comes close to nurture, not abandon. Yet many of us shrink from the work, settling for the "outward look" of spiritual health—big leafy branches that impress but bear no real fruit. In striving to appear strong, we risk starving our own souls and those who rely on us. Or is that just my problem?

Embracing conflict as part of intimacy means letting go of control, acknowledging wounds and fears, trusting that grace will hold us together. It means releasing the need to always be "right" and allowing the Spirit to develop in us real love, patience, and kindness.

So welcome the Gardener's work. Receive pruning as a pathway into deeper intimacy with God. Allow discomfort to become growth, and trust the Spirit to shape fruit that lasts.

Jesus invites us to abide—remain close, not just perform, but draw life from Him. The Father's pruning lovingly removes whatever blocks fruitfulness so the Spirit's love and companionship can flourish. Perfectionism leads to withering, but openness to God's intimate work leads to true abundance.

Are you satisfied with the occasional brush of connection, or are you truly abiding in the Vine? Are you busy trying to impress others, or are you ready to let the Gardener shape something lasting within you? Before we read John 15 together, pause for a prayer:

"God, I invite Your pruning hand. Help me trust Your love, even when it hurts. Make me fruitful, not just impressive. Teach me to abide."

## Scripture Focus

*I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit in me. He prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. You are clean already because of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; and such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and are burned up. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. My Father is honored by this, that you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples. Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; remain in my love. If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete. My commandment is this—to love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this—that one lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because the*

*slave does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that remains, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. This I command you—to love one another. — John 15:3-17*

## **Secure Attachment: Rooted and Fruitful**

Secure attachment to Jesus means trusting the Gardener's intimate care even when the "cuts" sting. It's growing to believe that God's pruning is not rejection but deep love for flourishing.

- **Fruit Is Evidence of Connection:** The fruit we bear is not about looking spiritual on the outside or meeting a checklist, but about the deep work of abiding on the inside. When connected to Jesus, love and patience overflow in ways that surprise us and bless others.
- **Growth Flows From Secure Attachment:** The healthiest people you know are likely not those who try the hardest but those who live from a grounded connection to Christ. Their spiritual fruit grows quietly through daily dependence and trust.
- **Maturity Affects Mission:** As your inner life blossoms, your influence and care naturally spill over into community—healing, restoring, and nurturing others as part of a living network of branches rooted in the Vine.

## Journaling Prompt

Write about a time when abiding in Christ brought joy and peace through growth, and another when pruning or conflict felt difficult. What might Jesus be inviting you into now? Reflect on a relationship where conflict led to greater closeness, and what you learned about God, yourself, and the other person.

## Reflection Questions

- How do I experience abiding in Jesus in daily life?
- What spiritual fruit is growing in me, and where do I feel dry or resistant?
- How do I respond to conflict in relationships—with avoidance, defensiveness, or openness?
- In what ways might God be pruning me through challenges right now?

- How can I embrace vulnerability and deepen intimacy with God and others through conflict?

### **Group Discussion**

- Share examples of steady fruitfulness nurtured by secure attachment to Jesus.
- Discuss what it means to “love as Jesus loved” within your group or family.
- Explore ways to encourage one another to abide more deeply and bear lasting fruit.

### **Action Step**

This week, identify one area in your life—whether a relationship, habit, or spiritual posture—where you tend to avoid conflict, criticism, or pruning. Prayerfully choose to lean into that discomfort with openness and humility. Take one concrete step to embrace vulnerability, whether by initiating an honest conversation, confessing a struggle to God or a trusted friend, or intentionally surrendering control. Journal about the experience and what God reveals to you in this process.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, You are the Gardener who prunes with loving care. Teach me to abide fully in Jesus—trusting Your pruning for lasting fruitfulness. Jesus, help me live as Your friend, loving as You loved and bearing fruit that glorifies the Father. Spirit, empower me to produce Your fruit daily and embrace the pruning and challenges that deepen my intimacy with You and others. Grant me courage to be vulnerable, grace to forgive, and steadfastness through every season of growth. Amen.*

As we bear fruit through God's pruning, we also hear the call to move beyond personal growth into living on mission, sharing hope with others.

## Further Study

- Jeremiah 17:7-8: Confidence in God leads to flourishing.
- Philippians 1:9-11: Prayer for abounding love and discernment
- Colossians 1:9-12: Growing in wisdom, knowledge, and endurance

# Chapter Nine

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## Mission Forward

The journey with Jesus isn't meant to be a solo trek, nor is it simply about personal survival. Sometimes it may feel as if you're stuck—emotionally, vocationally, even geographically—but what if God has intentionally planted you in this place for something deeper than comfort or escape? It's easy to wonder if your hardships have been custom-engineered, but it's not helpful to treat every struggle that way. What is true is that Jesus is irresistibly drawn to broken places.

Jesus is magnetically attracted to brokenness.

It's where He meets us, where transformation begins, and where we're shaped for the sake of others.

I'm reminded of the story of a pastor imprisoned for his faith who once asked Jesus why he was stuck in confinement when his calling seemed to lie elsewhere. Jesus gently replied: It took great effort and coordination to get you exactly where I wanted you to serve. What if, instead of being stuck, you're actually called?

Picture the contrast between a massive cruise ship—built for comfort and entertainment—and a small, sturdy Coast Guard lifeboat launched into stormy seas for rescue. As you grow in trusting Je-

sus, you're invited beyond seeking shelter for yourself to becoming a lifeboat, moving steadily toward others in need.

This apprenticeship echoes my own formative years—growing up on a farm with my dad, who saw us not as laborers obeying orders but as partners in meaningful work. Whether fixing fences or repairing engines, I learned most when we worked side by side. Solo tasks (like cleaning the garage) always felt draining, but with him nearby, even the hardest jobs gave me purpose and joy. That's the daily invitation of Jesus: to learn by doing, to stumble sometimes, but always to join Him as apprentices in His mission.

Before you can effectively reach out, ensure your own connection with Jesus is strong. Think back on our earlier metaphors—without a firm foundation, efforts to help can end up chaotic or exhausting, for you and those you wish to serve. What kind of “home” are you inviting people into? When rooted in the obedience and presence of Jesus, your life can become a true sanctuary amid storms.

You need Jesus as the anchor for your soul. Anchors hold fast and don't drag others down—they stabilize lifeboats, which are built to rescue. If you're deeply rooted in Christ, your own healing grows into a place of fruitfulness; your life begins to produce what every heart longs for, the Spirit's fruit, pointing others toward Jesus.

Have I pushed the edge on mixing metaphors yet?

## Scripture Focus

*We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the*

*model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family. And those he marked out in advance, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.— Romans 8:28-30*  
(Bible For Everyone)

*Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.— 2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

*Brothers and sisters, if a person is discovered in some sin, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness. Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too. Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.— Galatians 6:1-2*

## **Co-Operation**

In the last chapter, we explored how secure attachment to Jesus inherently produces love. Now we step deeper into what that love looks like as mission—living as God's agents in a broken world.

Romans 8:28 is pivotal here. It reveals a cooperative rhythm in God's redemptive work: God isn't simply fixing things alone; He partners with us. Throughout the chapter, Paul speaks of co-laboring, co-suffering, being co-heirs with Christ. This means we aren't spectators but apprentices, invited daily to join God in renewing all things. "God works all things together for good *with* those who love him." Does that include you?

Far from passive bystanders praying from the sidelines, we are hands and feet in God's workshop, using the gifts and tools He has graciously given to build and bless His kingdom. This cooperation invites responsibility and wonder—an invitation to apprenticed partnership with the sovereign Creator.

## **Becoming a Lifeboat**

The secure peace you've found in Jesus is not reserved solely for your benefit. It overflows, equipping you to be a lifeboat—an immediate refuge for those struggling in storms. This looks like listening without agenda, sharing your story vulnerably, and boldly praying with and for others amid their hardships.

I'm pretty vulnerable in conversations with people. I am an open book. Leading with vulnerability opens up trust in really remarkable ways that leads to a breath of fresh air and fruitful conversations. I curate as many of these conversations, in groups I am part of, as possible. For me it's the only way to travel.

This mission is never a solo journey. It unfolds best in community—the shared life of church and relationships where love and healing multiply. Together, you embody the Body of Christ, a network of safe harbors and sources of hope.

## Living the Apprenticeship Daily

Imagine every day is “Bring Your Child to Work Day” in God’s cosmic workshop. You aren’t just watching over His shoulder or swept off to the corner; you’re right beside Him—tools in hand, heart open, an active apprentice in His kingdom work.

Remembering those childhood moments for me is important—tagging along as Dad fixed a fence. Maybe you can imagine with me. Sometimes your hands weren’t quite strong enough, sometimes you made more sawdust than anything useful, but what mattered most was simply being chosen to join, learning as you went, discovering the meaning woven into ordinary effort. God echoes this invitation, drawing us near not as laborers on the outside, but beloved children trusted with real tasks.

Try beginning each day asking, “Abba, what are we working on today?” Maybe you sweep the shop, sand scrap lumber, or step bravely to a new challenge—what matters is your presence, willingness, and the daily rhythm of learning by doing.

Training happens in the quiet moments:

Offering a listening ear to a burdened friend

Speaking a gentle word in a tense meeting

Praying awkward prayers and trusting God to shape them

Serving in invisible, routine ways—acts of love that build His kingdom

Apprenticeship with Jesus isn’t about flawless expertise, but growing intimacy—a daily “yes” to the Father, to small acts, to correction and celebration. Over time, every choice and kindness becomes a building block in His masterpiece. The work is sometimes messy and sometimes slow, but you’re never alone; you’re always welcomed and equipped for today’s task, just as you are.

So step forward each morning and ask, “Father, what are we working on today?” Let Him delight in your progress, shape you with gentle wisdom, and show you grace for the journey. Your apprenticeship is sacred—today and always.

## **Journaling Prompt**

Reflect on a time when someone’s presence—whether a friend, family member, or mentor—became a safe harbor for you in a difficult season. How did their steady love and faith impact your journey toward healing and hope?

Now consider your own journey: How has your growing attachment to Jesus shaped your ability to be a refuge for others? What small, everyday ways might God be inviting you to participate in His redemptive work right where you are?

Write honestly about any fears, hopes, or barriers you sense as you step into this calling. What is one concrete step you can take this week to become a lifeboat for someone else?

## Reflection Questions

- Who around you is yearning for someone to carry their burdens?
- How might your journey of love and healing gently invite others into hope?
- What fears or old habits hinder you from reaching into your community?

## Group Discussion

Share stories of times you've been the refuge or needed one yourself. Discuss practical ways your group can create and sustain safe spaces and step into mission together.

## Action Step

This week, identify one person to provide spiritual refuge to—by listening, praying, caring. Journal what God shows you in the experience, and share with a trusted community member.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for the deep mystery of Your plan—that even in seasons when I feel stuck, You are at work preparing me for something greater than comfort or escape. Help me to trust that my current place and pain are not wasted but are shaping me into the person You created me to be. Jesus, You are drawn to brokenness and meet me in my most vulnerable places. Thank You for transforming my wounds into wells of hope and healing—not just for myself, but so I can become a lifeboat for others adrift in the storms of life. Teach me to lean in as Your apprentice, learning Your ways day by day, and to embrace the imperfect journey with grace and courage. Holy Spirit, empower me with Your presence and wisdom. Remind me always to secure my own oxygen mask first—rooting deeply in You—so that I might overflow with love, compassion, and strength for those You bring across my path. Help me to listen without agenda, to share vulnerably, and to pray boldly for the hurting.*

*God, my Redeemer and Sustainer, teach me the rhythm of co-laboring with You in this world. May I walk faithfully as a partner in Your kingdom work—ever humble, always dependent—and joyfully participate in Your redemptive mission. In the name of Jesus, my Savior and Friend, I pray. Amen.*

As you step more fully into your role as a lifeboat, remember the work is never done. Secure attachment flows into mission, but it also reveals deeper places needing healing. Stepping into mission, we find our strength depends on ongoing healing of the hidden wounds that otherwise hinder our calling.

**Further Study**

- Matthew 5:14–16—Being a light in the world
  
- Romans 12:9–13—Practicing genuine love and hospitality
  
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11—Encouraging and building up one another

# Chapter Ten

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## Healing Wounds

**H**idden wounds are often the most challenging to face. Like the deep tears in a hamstring muscle, invisible beneath the surface but causing persistent pain and limitation, our inner hurts can remain unhealed for years. I experienced this firsthand when I had three intramuscular tears within my hamstring right on my "sit bones"—hidden, stubborn, and painful. Though I could still mountain bike, play basketball, and enjoy other sports, I couldn't sit or sprint without discomfort. For two years, I hoped the injury would simply fade away, but it never got the rest it needed to repair. Only when I underwent a platelet-rich plasma (PRP) procedure—where a doctor provoked healing by re-igniting inflammation through injections made from my own blood—did my body begin the difficult work of repair. It was uncomfortable and far from easy, but necessary. No wonder I hesitated to seek help earlier, yet the everyday pain became too much to bear, and this pushed me into the healing process.

I've been wondering how similar this might be to the spiritual journey of healing hidden wounds—those emotional, relational, or spiritual hurts that don't always show on the surface but ache quietly inside us. Like those muscle tears, our inner wounds resist healing

when ignored or pushed aside. Healing requires courage to go beneath the surface, to invite Jesus into those quiet, painful places, and to trust in His renewing presence, even when the process is slow and uncomfortable. Are you noticing signs that you are hurting deeply from pain that you thought would be healed by now?

When I lost my 18-year-old daughter Ella to suicide, many hidden parts of my heart shattered and were revealed only later. Jesus is magnetically drawn to brokenness, and when I allow Him to work in those areas, He is profoundly faithful to bring healing. Ella would have turned 21 this summer, and I'm starting to realize the various wounds that might have formed over that time. My allegiance to Jesus has grown stronger throughout this grief journey, yet there are still other little wounds that refuse to heal.

Occasionally, a panic will shudder through me as I wonder about the safety of my other five children and my son-in-law. Allegiance to Jesus means safety and security in the inner realm of our hearts, but only when we consciously give those areas over to Him. Even this morning, I took Jesus on a tour of my castle walls—asking Him to stand guard in places where I feel less secure. Can I really entrust everyone and everything to Jesus after facing the tragedy of suicide in the family He entrusted to me?

My prayer life has known times of depth and joy but also seasons of futility. If Jesus is willing to allow the death of my little princess, what else is on the table? Why pray for anything? Yet, Jesus continually invites me to go deeper, to reveal my hurts honestly, and to wrestle with trust issues—especially with Him.

## Scripture Focus

*The godly cry out and the LORD hears; he saves them from all their troubles. The LORD is near the brokenhearted; he delivers those who are discouraged. — Psalm 34:17-18*

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, because the Lord has chosen me. He has commissioned me to encourage the poor, to help the brokenhearted, to decree the release of captives, and the freeing of prisoners, to announce the year when the LORD will show his favor, the day when our God will seek vengeance, to console all who mourn, to strengthen those who mourn in Zion, by giving them a turban, instead of ashes, oil symbolizing joy, instead of mourning, a garment symbolizing praise, instead of discouragement. They will be called oaks of righteousness, trees planted by the LORD to reveal his splendor. — Isaiah 61:1-3*

*Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just*

*as the sufferings of Christ overflow toward us, so also our comfort through Christ overflows to you. — 2 Corinthians 1:3-5*

These verses reveal God's tender heart, drawn to our hidden pain. They invite us to bring our brokenness openly before Him, trusting His desire to heal—not condemn—and to comfort us in every loss, grief, and unspoken struggle.

## **The Path to Healing**

Hidden wounds—emotional, spiritual, or relational—often block our ability to trust God and truly abide in His love. Healing is rarely instantaneous or straightforward; it is a courageous process of intentionality, honesty, and divine grace. This journey involves several key steps:

- **Acknowledging Pain:** Healing begins when we shine light on what has long been hidden. Daring to bring these wounds into God's presence—and where safe, into trustworthy community—is the first step toward restoration. It requires humility and courage to face what we might prefer to avoid.
- **Receiving God's Comfort:** God promises to be near the brokenhearted. Trusting in His compassionate presence sustains us through the slow and sometimes painful work of healing. His comfort renews our hope and fortifies our spirit.
- **Confession and Release:** Healing involves honestly confessing bitterness, shame, anger, or disappointment—letting

go of what holds us captive. This release creates space for God's healing to take root.

- **Christian Therapist:** I've been so blessed to have a mental health therapist to walk with me through the pain and brokenness of my life in this last season. Do not be afraid to find someone to be completely honest with. This has helped me in my journey to be more vulnerable with other people as well.
- **Community Support:** Healing deepens within networks of prayer, encouragement, accountability, and shared grace. Choosing safe people to walk alongside us is vital—to carry burdens together, to encourage, and to pray for renewal.
- **Ongoing Renewal:** Healing is often a non-linear process marked by progress, setbacks, and fresh discovery. It demands patience and involves repeated invitations for God's presence and transformation. The Spirit gently leads us deeper into restoration over time.

## Addressing Resistance and Fear

Many resist digging into hidden wounds because of fear—fear of God's judgment, fear of feeling overwhelmed, or fear of vulnerability. It can seem safer to numb pain or pretend all is well. This chapter encourages leaning into those fears with grace. Jesus welcomes honesty, not pretense. Facing these fears is itself a step toward abundant life and secure attachment. Trust grows in the tension between pain and hope, as God's steadfast love meets us where we are.

## Spiritual Practices for Healing

- **Lament and Honest Prayer:** Bring honest sorrow and questions to God. Use lament Psalms or your own words to express grief and confusion—such as Psalm 13’s plea for help amid feeling forgotten, Psalm 22’s raw cry in distress, or Psalm 34:18’s assurance that “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.” God honors truth expressed in faith.
- **Scripture Meditation:** Regularly meditate on passages that affirm God’s healing power, such as Psalm 147:3 or Isaiah 61, to anchor your hope.
- **Journaling:** Write dialogs with Jesus about your wounds—your fears, hopes, and God’s promises.
- **Sacred Stillness:** Practice quiet moments inviting God’s presence into hidden places, welcoming His peace without rushing the process. Take Jesus on a tour of the inner places of your heart.
- **Community Engagement:** Share with trusted spiritual friends or groups who provide prayerful support and safe accountability.

## Practical Application

### Healing Reflection

Take time this week to identify any ongoing wounds, grief, or spiritual

struggles that affect your faith journey. Journal about how these hidden places impact your trust in God and your daily rhythms.

### **Confession and Prayer**

Practice confessing your pain, bitterness, or disappointment to God. When ready, share your struggles with a spiritually mature friend or group who can cover you in prayer.

### **Community Connection**

Cultivate relationships offering compassion, patience, and accountability. Consider seeking support groups or professional counseling if wounds run deep.

## **Journaling Prompt**

Write about a time God's comfort met you in a hidden place of hurt or brokenness. What helped you move toward restoration? How might you invite God's healing into your current struggles?

## **Reflection Questions**

- What hidden wounds or burdens weigh on my heart and affect my relationship with God?
- How have I experienced God's healing or comfort in difficult seasons?

- Who can I trust to walk alongside me in this journey of healing and renewal?
- What fears or resistances might be keeping me from addressing these wounds openly?

### **Group Discussion**

- Share a hidden struggle or wound you feel ready to bring into the light.
- Discuss ways your community can create safe spaces for healing and restoration.
- Open up and share, how you can support one another on the path toward wholeness.

### **Action Step**

This week, gently identify one hidden wound or spiritual struggle. Take a small step toward healing—through prayer, confession, seeking community, or professional support. Journal the experience, and if comfortable, share your journey with someone who can encourage and pray for you.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for drawing near to my broken and hidden places, for not turning away from what feels too deep or too painful to face. Your love reaches into the shadows where I hide my wounds and longs to bring light and healing. Jesus, I bring before You the parts of my heart still aching, the memories and fears I hesitate to name. I ask for Your gentle touch to bring restoration where there has been brokenness, and for Your peace to calm the unrest within. Spirit, I invite You to guide me through this slow and often difficult work of renewal. Teach me to be patient and courageous as You transform me from within. Help me surrender control and place my trust fully in Your faithful presence. Heal not only my soul but also my relationships, that I might walk in wholeness and share Your comfort with others. May my heart rest securely in You, finding hope and strength beyond the wounds. I declare You as my refuge and healer, confident in Your unfailing love. Amen.*

Healing in community roots us more deeply, preparing us to carry each other through life's storms with grace and strength. In the next chapter, we'll step into this sacred space—exploring how being rooted together can sustain us, nurture our growth, and help us carry each other through life's storms.

## Further Study

- Psalm 147:3 — God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

- Matthew 11:28-30 — Jesus' invitation to the weary and burdened for rest
  
- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 — God's sustaining grace in our weakness

# Chapter Eleven

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## Rooted Together

Picture a grove of towering redwood trees, their trunks reaching toward the heavens—majestic and strong. But the true power lies unseen beneath the surface, where their roots intertwine deeply, drawing nourishment not only from their own foundation but from the entire network of roots surrounding them. This intricate, shared root system creates a forest that stands resilient through storms, droughts, and shifting seasons.

### **Family and Growing Support**

In much the same way, spiritual growth and resilience flourish in a community of honest, connected believers. I've witnessed this truth firsthand in my own life. Heather and I started our family by adoption, stepping out in faith into an ever-expanding circle of love and responsibility. Starting with one infant boy, then adding a second rambunctious Guatemalan brother, followed by a Nicaraguan girl, and suddenly welcoming a sibling trio through foster care and then adoption overnight, we found ourselves needing more and more support. And that support came, not just from us, but from a wide family

that has grown around us: friends, church members, mentors, and neighbors who didn't just watch the chaos from the porch but came alongside in tangible ways.

Just last week, I watched from the kitchen as four of my adult children laughed, teased, and goofed off together—a joy beyond words. From the very beginning, Heather and I realized that what God was doing was far bigger than just our little household. It was a picture of the gospel family—a family built not on biology or what the world measures as some manageable size, but on deep connections formed by the Spirit of God, with porous boundaries that allow grace to flow freely. Our church family lovingly wrapped around us, offering not only nurture but also strength and practical support through all the challenges and trials.

### **Biblical and Early Church Reflection**

The community pictured in the Bible—and especially in the early church—was tight-knit and mutually dependent, requiring each other to overcome all obstacles. It's in these stories, and in the ordinary moments of everyday life, that we see the power and challenge of being rooted together. We all have seasons when life feels heavy—loss, transition, struggles that press in on every side. In those seasons, being carried by others' prayers, practical help, and presence becomes not just a blessing but a lifeline. There is a sacred beauty in shared faith: a community that surrounds a hurting friend, celebrates breakthroughs, and wrestles honestly with doubt and hope.

## **The Nature and Call of Gospel Community**

This interconnectedness is the essence of what it means to live as a family in Christ—where no one walks alone, no one is just an isolated person, but all are part of a living, breathing body that thrives on mutual care and deep connection. Like those redwoods standing tall, it is the unseen bonds beneath that hold us steady. This is both a gift and a challenge—a call to embrace the messy, beautiful, costly work of rooted community.

So as you read on, consider: Who has carried you in times of hardship? Who surrounds you in faith and love? What might it look like for you to widen your circle beyond what feels comfortable—to open your life like a redwood grove opens its roots, deeply intertwined and flourishing together? Yet this vision of deep, rooted community is increasingly challenged by a prevailing culture of radical individualism that pulls us apart. This is the journey of being rooted in the family of God.

## **The Challenge of Radical Individualism**

Modern society is marked by a powerful cultural shift toward radical individualism—a social ethos that prizes personal freedom, self-definition, and private spiritual experience over communal bonds. Sociological research shows that this prevailing mindset reshapes not only how believers relate but also the very structure of communities, weakening the shared commitment that fosters trust, accountability, and mutual care. Instead of tightly interwoven roots, many individuals experience a fragmented and isolated existence, lacking the deep,

covenantal connections necessary for flourishing faith and life. Do you feel this? How are you addressing this?

## Scripture Focus

*For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another. And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. If it is service, he must serve; if it is teaching, he must teach; if it is exhortation, he must exhort; if it is contributing, he must do so with sincerity; if it is leadership, he must do so with diligence; if it is showing mercy, he must do so with cheerfulness. — Romans 12:4-8*

*Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another. If one member suffers, everyone suffers with it. If a member is honored, all rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it. — 1 Corinthians 12:24b-27*

*I give you a new commandment—to love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.  
Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if  
you have love for one another. — John 13:34-35*

## **Embracing Community Amidst Individualism**

God's design for our growth is deeply communal. We were never meant to journey alone. Community is the context God chose for encouragement, accountability, healing, and transformation. Like Paul describes in Romans, though many, we are one body in Christ, intimately connected and mutually dependent. True belonging means sharing in each other's joys and carrying one another's burdens with tenderness and strength. Growth happens most deeply when we risk sharing vulnerabilities—our doubts, wounds, and hopes—with safe people who respond with grace and truth. Genuine community demands courage, vulnerability, and mutual responsibility, recognizing each person's unique gifts and calling.

Yet today's culture often pulls us in the opposite direction with radical individualism—a worldview exalting personal freedom, self-definition, and private spiritual expression above communal life. Instead of interconnected roots like redwoods, many resemble isolated palms in a desert—scattered and vulnerable to harsh spiritual forces. Author Mark Sayers critiques this mindset in the modern church, where a "platform mentality" prioritizes personal expression over deep, committed community. Online connection, while abundant, often sacrifices quality, breeding consumeristic faith shaped by convenience and preference rather than covenantal engagement. This fracturing

leaves believers isolated, spiritually fragile, and hungry for authentic belonging.

## **The Loneliness Epidemic**

Loneliness is now recognized as a major public health crisis, affecting 1 in 6 people globally and contributing to an estimated 871,000 deaths each year—about 100 every hour. Experts warn that social isolation dramatically raises risks for anxiety, depression, heart disease, stroke, and early death, with health impacts comparable to smoking or obesity. When we lack genuine, embodied community, stress responses intensify and immune systems weaken—making deep connection essential for both spiritual and physical well-being.

Despite our culture's focus on independence and self-expression, individualism often leaves us more anxious, isolated, and vulnerable. Far from the peace promised in the gospel, many experience spiritual dryness and emotional fragmentation as they pursue life alone. The church's call to real connection is not just about spiritual nurture—it's a matter of holistic health and hope in a disconnected world.

## **Theological Implications of Isolation**

Theologically, radical individualism undermines the gospel call to unity. Without deep roots in community, faith falters when trials come. Sayers warns that individualism transforms the church into a crowd of disconnected spectators rather than an engaged family of apprentices. Elevating the self above sacred community encourages spiritual consumerism and leaves us vulnerable to exhaustion, mistrust, and loneliness.

Understanding the steep costs of fractured social bonds underscores why Scripture so vividly pictures the Christian life as a richly interconnected body, a living network of care and love. Theologically, community is not optional but foundational—God’s design for human flourishing and spiritual formation. Such rooted belonging forms a protective ecosystem that sustains us through trials, nurtures emotional resilience, and cultivates the fruit of the Spirit. Authentic community, therefore, becomes a vital source of healing and hope, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

## **Cultivating Anchored Community**

The way forward is a return to the soil—a commitment to authentic, anchored community marked by vulnerability, mutual care, and shared belonging. Like redwoods whose intertwined roots create resilient ecosystems, we flourish when deeply connected. This requires humility to share joys and pains, a shift from performance to presence, and embracing rhythms of prayer, Scripture, honest conversation, shared meals, and service.

We were never meant to journey alone. Community is God’s chosen context for encouragement, accountability, healing, and transformation. True belonging means celebration and burden-bearing, with growth ignited through grace-filled vulnerability. Though fear and barriers may tempt us toward isolation, embracing community invites authentic presence and mutual responsibility.

## **Practical Application**

- **Initiate Connection:** Take a first step—invite someone for a walk or coffee, join a group, or reach out to a neighbor or

church member unfamiliar to you.

- **Practice Hospitality:** Create space for others in your home and life. Hospitality is about a welcoming heart, not perfection.
- **Share Honestly:** Move beyond small talk. Dare to reveal struggles, joys, and questions. Vulnerability invites others to do the same.
- **Give and Receive Help:** Let others know when you need prayer or support. Notice opportunities to encourage, pray for, or serve someone else.
- **Establish Community Rhythms:** Meet regularly for prayer, Scripture reading, and honest conversation. Share meals, celebrate milestones, and serve together.

## Journaling Prompt

Reflect on a season when authentic community made a significant difference in your spiritual journey. What did you receive? What did you contribute? Where might God be inviting you to invest more deeply in relationships now?

## Reflection Questions

- Where have you experienced the strength or comfort of spiritual community?
- What fears or barriers keep you from deeper relational connection?
- What step can you take toward greater honesty, hospitality, or support?
- What gifts or experiences can you offer for the growth of others?

## Group Discussion

- What does “belonging” look like practically where you are?
- Where do you see opportunities for deeper trust, honesty, or shared mission?
- How can you support each other in practicing the R.O.W. Pathway (Repent, Obey, Worship) together?

## Action Step

This week, intentionally reach out to someone in your faith community. Offer encouragement, ask for prayer, or invite them to share a meal. Notice how your sense of belonging and purpose begins to grow as you invest in others.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for welcoming me into Your family with open arms and unfailing love. Jesus, teach me to love others as You have loved me—sacrificially, honestly, and joyfully—help me to serve with humility, forgive with grace, and bear one another’s burdens with compassion. Holy Spirit, knit our hearts together in perfect unity, breaking down walls of division and cultivating a community grounded in Your grace, truth, and peace. May our relationships be a living testimony of Your transforming power, a safe haven for healing, and a light that draws others to Your love. Empower us to encourage, support, and grow together as we reflect Your heart to the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

As we root ourselves deeply in community, we prepare to live anchored in Christ through life’s storms. Next, we will explore what it means to be anchored for the journey, held fast through every challenge by the hope and love of Jesus.



# Chapter Twelve

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## Anchored and Secure

Imagine a family on a small boat anchored for the night in the midst of an approaching storm. The skies darken, and the waves grow restless, yet the boat remains steady, tied securely by an anchor that holds firm beneath the turbulent waters. The family gathers together on deck, watching Mom—the pilot—intently, wondering if they should fear the storm or simply trust her steady hand. Mom’s calm and confident presence reassures them: they will not be carried off course; the anchor holds, and they will ride out the storm safely.

Earlier in this journey, we stood with the disciples in their boat as waves roared and terror mounted, and witnessed how their deepest fear shifted—from the storm outside to the startling presence of Jesus within. Now, having explored secure attachment and the anchoring grace of Christ, we are ready to see the story’s end.

Imagine again that small boat, tossed on the water. This time, though, pay attention to the quiet after the storm. When Jesus speaks and the raging sea falls silent, the disciples do not leap up in re-

lief alone—they stare in awe, their hearts beating fast with reverent fear: “*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!*” (Mark 4:41).

It is here, in the calm that follows chaos, that true anchoring takes place. What begins as a desperate cry for refuge (“save us!”) transforms into reverence (“anchor us in your power!”). We discover that security in Christ is not mere comfort or safety—it is rooted in holy awe before the One whose authority can still storms, change hearts, and call us deeper.

The peace Jesus gives is not just the absence of trouble, but the presence of a King whose love unsettles, restores, and re-centers us. Anchored in Jesus, we learn to rest—not because storms disappear, but because we belong to the One whose presence is both our refuge and our holy ground.

Let’s consider the reason we can rest: a kingdom not built by us but held by God.

Last night, around a campfire with a group of trusted friends, a question came up. Quinn asked me first and then asked about eight others, “Aaron, how do you rest?” My response was that if I were building my own kingdom, I would have no rest since I would always be defending it. But if I am working on kingdom projects, then I know that when I take a break or sleep at night, God will continue on His project. I don’t know about you, but I don’t have any sense of assurance that God is committed to building my kingdom. The call is quite different, and the Lord’s Prayer reminds us that it is His name, His kingdom, and His will that matter. As in heaven so on earth. The only way I can rest is if I know that my kingdom has been turned over to Jesus’s kingdom—so that, in the end, all the kingdoms of this world will have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

Recently, I have been experiencing that kind of peace which is why I'm finally writing this book. Don't you want the quiet, steadfast assurance that comes from knowing the anchor is secure in Jesus Christ? When we ourselves are anchored deeply in Him, we carry a peace that steadies others amid life's tempests. Just like this family trusts their pilot, our community can look to those rooted in Christ, drawing calm and courage from their example. This is the heart of secure attachment—not only resting in Christ personally but becoming safe harbors of hope and strength for those journeying alongside us. We are anchored—for ourselves and for each other—by a steadfast hope that endures beyond the waves.

### Scripture Focus

*In the same way God wanted to demonstrate more clearly to the heirs of the promise that his purpose was unchangeable, and so he intervened with an oath, so that we who have found refuge in him may find strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us through two unchangeable things, since it is impossible for God to lie. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast, which reaches inside behind the curtain, where Jesus our forerunner entered on our behalf... — Hebrews 6:18–19*

*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion;  
it cannot be upended and will endure forever. As the*

*mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, now and forevermore. — Psalm 125:1-2*

*I thank my God every time I remember you. I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. — Philippians 1:6*

## **Who or What is My Anchor?**

We've discussed that your family system might have given you some wrong signals about whom you can trust, if anyone at all. Your parent might not have been the one giving you calm assurance as the boat rocks in the night storm. Our the current cultural moment is marked by widespread anxiety, instability, and distraction, often amplified by fast-paced information and social pressures. This is not the time to "muscle through" or fake confidence. It is time to draw near to Jesus as The Anchor for our souls. Jesus invites us to a deep, inner communion and now dwells inside believers' hearts, offering ongoing nourishment, healing, and strength beyond external circumstances.

We've been learning that true rest and peace come not from striving, performance, or self-reliance but from learning to trust deeply in God's sovereignty—acknowledging that God can accomplish His purposes without our control or perfection. Jesus' journey to the

heavenly temple as our great High Priest marks the foundation of our secure attachment to Him. Through His perfect, sinless life and His sacrificial blood, He purified our hearts and made us fit dwellings for God's presence. The blood is the life of the creature and the blood of a blameless and pure creature can travel where you and I cannot — to the very Presence of God. Unlike the old covenant rituals where innocent animal blood was used to symbolically cover sin, Jesus offered His own blood for eternal redemption—entering the Most Holy Place once and for all on our behalf and offering His blood (Hebrews 6:18–19). This profound act guarantees those "in Christ" direct access to the Father, unshaken hope, and a steadfast anchor for our souls.

This reality is not merely theological abstraction, but it invites a daily rhythm of trust and allegiance. The communion table becomes a sacred moment to remember and renew our covenant with Christ—the "new covenant in His blood." As we partake with others in the body and blood, we join a communal rhythm of resting in His finished work, proclaiming His cleansing power, and affirming our identity as His cherished, forgiven people. This profound act echoes the story that we are purified, chosen, and held fast by God's unchangeable promise.

### **Living Anchored in Christ**

Paul's confidence that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it" (Philippians 1:6) invites us to enjoy the journey of transformation. Secure attachment is not a perfect state but a life-long process of gradual deepening trust, daily abiding, and resilient hope. Though storms may come, we are not tossed by fear or uncertainty because our anchor is fixed in Christ's unshakable love.

Living anchored means cultivating ongoing connection through prayer, obedience, repentance, and worship—practices that build spiritual resilience and enable us to remain steady amid life’s challenges. As we abide in Him, our lives overflow with peace and strength, becoming safe harbors for others navigating their storms. This mutual bearing of burdens embodies the kingdom’s life and draws others to the calm assurance of Christ’s unbreakable reign.

- **Ongoing Attachment:**

Secure attachment to Jesus is not a one-time event; it’s a daily, lifelong journey. The storms will come, but your anchor holds.

- **Hope That Endures:**

Biblical hope is more than wishful thinking—it’s a confident expectation rooted in God’s character and promises.

- **Resilience and Perseverance:**

Practicing abiding, repentance, obedience, and worship builds inner strength—enabling you to weather trials, losses, and disappointments without being capsized.

- **Mission Continues:**

Anchored people become anchors for others, offering stability, encouragement, and hope to those still searching for safe harbor.

## Practical Application

- **Begin each day in prayer:**

“Jesus, be my anchor today. Hold me steady in Your love.”

- **Pause during turmoil:**

Remind yourself, “My hope is anchored in Christ, not my performance, feelings, or circumstances.”

- **Reflect each evening:**

- Where did I feel steady?
- Where did I drift?
- How did God show His faithfulness today?

## **Journaling Prompt**

Write about a recent “storm” you weathered. How did you experience God’s anchoring presence during that time? What practices or relationships helped you stay rooted in hope?

Reflect on how your life—anchored in Christ—can become a steadying testimony for your family, friends, and community. What opportunities do you see to share your journey of secure attachment with others who may feel adrift?

## **Reflection Questions**

- When have you felt most “anchored” in your faith? What

helped you remain steady?

- Where do you feel most vulnerable to drifting from hope or trust?
- How can you cultivate daily rhythms that keep you anchored in Jesus?

## **Group Discussion**

- What does it look like to be an anchored boat, or port in the storm, for one another?
- How can your community help each other remain steadfast through life's storms?
- What legacy of hope and faith do you want to leave for others?

## **Action Step**

This week, choose one anchoring practice—prayer, scripture meditation, a gratitude list, or reaching out for support. Try it each day and notice how it shapes your response to stress and change.

## Prayer Focus

*Father, thank You for being my unshakable foundation—my rock and refuge in every storm, my constant source of strength and peace when the winds of life howl around me. Your steadfast love and faithfulness sustain me through every trial and uncertainty. Teach me to lean fully on You, trusting that You hold me securely in Your hands. Jesus, anchor my soul deeply in Your boundless love and everlasting hope. When I feel overwhelmed or discouraged, remind me of Your presence that never fades. Help me to remain rooted in Your grace, resting in Your promises, and growing in the security that only You provide. May Your peace guard my heart and mind, and may my life reflect the hope I have found in You. Spirit, empower me with courage and wisdom to stand firm in the truth of who You are, even when doubts arise and challenges press in. Fill me with boldness to live anchored in Your word and ready to encourage others with this same hope. Use me as a beacon of light, a steady anchor to those around me who may feel adrift or lost. Guide me daily to embody Your truth, love, and peace that transform and sustain. Amen.*

Let this chapter mark not just an end, but a sending: as you live anchored in Christ, become the harbor where others find hope, stability, and the welcome of God's enduring love. Your journey in secure attachment is just beginning—and you are never alone in the storms that lie ahead.

## Further Study

- Isaiah 43:1–3—God's presence in deep waters



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# Conclusion

**S**ecurity in Jesus is not a finish line; it's the way of the faithful life. As you've walked through old storms and found new shelter, named your wounds and found fresh hope, you've lived what this journey is all about.

Perhaps along the way you've discovered holy honesty, new ways to pause and abide, or small steps of turning toward Jesus just as you are. Maybe you've tasted the joy of belonging—both to Christ and to a circle of fellow travelers. Or if your progress feels halting, know that every step counts.

This path isn't about achieving perfection, but about direction—returning again and again to the One whose love is steadfast, whose refuge is never closed, whose arms are always open. In Jesus, you are forever welcomed, faithfully pursued, and never alone.

As you keep taking your next steps, remember: the hope and security you've found are meant to be shared. Become a harbor for others. Invite them to the only Anchor that holds in every storm.

May Jesus, your true refuge, be your confidence. May the Spirit grow trust and fruit that remains in you. And may you rest secure—anchored in grace, and sent into the world as a living sign that, in Him, there is safety for every soul. Amen.

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If you would like to discuss the book feel free to reach out.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Aaron Bauer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aaron Bauer

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