



The God Who Hears



The God Who Hears

HOW THE STORY OF THE BIBLE SHAPES OUR PRAYERS

Sarah Ivill



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The God Who Hears
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To my beloved Savior, my Great High Priest,
Who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus the Son of God,
Who is able to sympathize with my weaknesses
And who in all points was tempted as I am,
Yet without sin,
And who has given me the gift to boldly
Come to the throne of grace,
That I may obtain mercy and
Find grace to help in time of need.

—based on Hebrews 4:14–16

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A Note from Sarah

This book is a biblical theology of prayer. Understanding prayer as it unfolds from Genesis through Revelation reveals the foundation and motivation for prayer. We begin with the truth that God has initiated a conversation with us. He has created us to be in relationship with Him. We don't have to wonder if "someone up there" hears our pleas; we can be confident our Creator hears us, knows us, and loves us. Studying prayer through the unfolding story of Scripture will teach us how to pray, but more importantly it will reveal the covenant God to whom we pray. His ears are open, and He will hear His daughters. He delights in our prayers and praise. In prayer we come before the Lord of all the earth, the Creator of our body and soul, the Savior of the world. My prayer for you as you study the story of Scripture is simple. I want you, dear reader, to delight in prayer—and not just in prayer but also in the God who invites us to pray.

Acknowledgments

I was introduced to biblical theology through Westminster Theological Seminary when many years ago I read the required books for their master of divinity degree program. Authors like Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Edmund Clowney, Dennis Johnson, Iain Duguid, and Greg Beale have been of tremendous benefit to me. So I was excited when Reformation Heritage Books, especially Jay Collier and David Woollin, was enthusiastic about and supportive of this writing project.

I also want to thank the pastors of Christ Covenant Church (PCA) for faithfully proclaiming the word of God each week and making prayer a central part of worship as well as everything else we do. I'm grateful also for the women in my Bible study class who allow me the privilege of coming alongside them in prayer and who faithfully pray for me.

Thank you to my dad and mom, David and Judy Gelaude, who have faithfully prayed for me over the years. I love you both more than words can express, and it's my delight to pray for both of you.

Thank you to my husband, Charles, who prays with me and for me often, especially for my writing projects, and who grants me the privilege of praying for him. And thank you to our children, Caleb, Hannah, Daniel, and Lydia: your prayers are precious as I watch you grow in the faith that your dad and I hold so dear.

Finally, thank you to my heavenly Father, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit for making prayer possible. It is one of my greatest joys and privileges to pray to the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. And it is one of my greatest comforts that the Spirit helps me in my weakness because I don't know what to pray for as I ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for me according to the will of God (see Rom. 8:26–27).



Introduction to a Biblical Theology of Prayer

I have always loved stories. When I was younger, one of my favorite things to do was sit with a good book and read. Now that I'm a mother, one of my favorite things is to sit with my four children and read. Oftentimes I get so lost in the story I'm reading that I lose track of time. I would rather not stop for lunch because I want to see how the story progresses or ends. In many cases the characters become our friends as we're swept up with the story and imagine ourselves there with them.

But there's one story that can't be beat. I fell in love with this story when I was a young girl, and by God's grace I have never found one I love better—the story of the Bible. From the Law to the Prophets to the Psalms to the Gospels to the Epistles to Revelation, I'm often moved to tears of conviction and comfort as I read God's story. The overarching narrative of the Bible that speaks of creation, the fall, redemption, and consummation fits perfectly together as one organic whole. We shouldn't be surprised at its cohesiveness. The divine author, the Holy Spirit, inspired each of the human authors. No human could write such a story. The story of the Bible is to be highly esteemed. Think of “the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of humankind's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection

thereof.” Yet even so, only the Holy Spirit can work in our hearts so as to bring us to a “full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof.”¹

Since there is no other book on our shelves that can rival this story, I want to whet your appetite for studying the Bible and, particularly in this book, the theme of prayer in the Bible. Once you understand the Bible for the story that it is, you will be transformed. Your studies will be different, as well as your approach to your career, marital status, ministry, parenting, or care for aging parents. You will begin to see your smaller story in light of the larger story of the Bible, and you will begin to understand things you never understood before. So what is this great story that no other author has been able to rival?

The Story Is Covenantal

The primary author of the story of Scripture is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, but He used human authors inspired by His Spirit to write sixty-six books of the Bible over hundreds of years. This story speaks of the history of redemption that begins with creation (Genesis 1–2) and the fall (Genesis 3) and ends with the consummation of God’s kingdom (Revelation 21–22). The rest of the Bible focuses on redemption, so it’s easy to see why Christ is the central character in the story.

The covenantal framework of Scripture reveals the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. The covenant of redemption is described in Ephesians 1:4, which teaches us that God the Father chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him.” The Father has appointed our redemption, the Son has accomplished it, and the Holy Spirit applies it.

1. *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Christian Education and Publications, 2007), 1.5. All subsequent quotations of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Larger (WLC) and Shorter Catechisms (WSC) are taken from this edition.

The covenant of works, described in Genesis 1–2, was initiated by God with Adam and involved keeping the Sabbath day holy, ruling and multiplying, marriage and procreation, and a command. The Lord God told Adam that he could eat of any tree in the garden except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he ate of that tree, he would die. Tragically, Adam failed to obey, and all humankind fell with him in this first sin.

But death will not have the final word. The covenant of grace is established in Genesis 3:15. God promises that He will put enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring. The woman's offspring would bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent would bruise His heel. This is the gospel in seed form. Ultimately, the woman's offspring is Christ. Christ defeated sin and death on the cross, triumphing over all His enemies. The Westminster Larger Catechism 31 states, "The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed." This covenant of grace is progressively revealed throughout Scripture in God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:17–22; 8:20–22; 9:1–17), Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–2), Moses (Exodus 19–24), David (2 Samuel 7), and in the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34), all of which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

The Story Is Historical

We cannot read passages of Scripture about prayer without an understanding of their historical context. Genesis 1–2 introduces us to the Creator and covenant King who created Adam and Eve, real historical people. The fall of Adam and Eve into sin isn't a legend, but a true, historical incident that had radical implications for all humankind. Romans 5:12 states, "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Cain's murder of Abel was a real historical event. Likewise, the stories of Noah and the ark, the Tower of Babel, and the dispersion of the nations are historical facts.

As we move from Genesis to Revelation, we are reading about real history, yet it is selective history. The stories of creation, the fall, the flood, and God's covenant with Noah and the patriarchs are important snapshots that are foundational to understanding the rest of the story. God's covenant with Moses, His covenant with David, and the glory days of Solomon give us a glimpse of the coming kingdom of Christ. The exiles of Israel at the hand of the Assyrians and Judah at the hand of the Babylonians reveal how sinful humankind is and how desperate is their need for a Savior. The return to the land under Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel is a glimmer of hope, but still only a shadow of the glory to come in Christ.

The unfolding history of the Old Testament is concerned with the gospel. As Paul says in Galatians 3:8, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'" The Old Testament Scriptures preach the gospel! As Iain Duguid says, "Centrally, the Old Testament is a book about Christ, and more specifically, about his sufferings and the glories that will follow—that is, it is a book about the promise of a coming Messiah through whose sufferings God will establish his glorious, eternal kingdom. . . . The central thrust of every passage leads us in some way to the central message of the gospel."² So as we study passages about prayer from the Bible, we can be certain that they will somehow lead us to the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

The unfolding history of the Old Testament continues in the New Testament. The Gospels begin with the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. Then the book of Acts, Paul's letters to the churches, and the General Epistles deal with the beginning of the Interadvent age. Finally, the apostle John describes the consummation of the kingdom at the end of the book of Revelation.

2. Iain M. Duguid, "Old Testament Hermeneutics," in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), 17, 19.

The Story Is Redemptive

You barely begin reading the Bible when the breathtaking story of creation takes a turn for the worse. Adam and Eve failed to obey the Lord God and are forced to leave the garden of Eden, the place where they had enjoyed His presence. The Lord takes the initiative to redeem fallen humankind, but it's not an immediate transformation. The story is thousands of years long and is filled with anger and arrogance, lying and lust, malice and murder, sin and shame. The plot takes many surprising turns and has several alarming twists. On many occasions God's promises seem thwarted, and oftentimes His plans seem to hang in the balance. But through it all a ray of redemptive hope glimmers in the darkness.

Because the story is redemptive, the Redeemer is the key who holds the Old and New Testaments together. The promises of God, the prophecies spoken on behalf of the Lord, the sacrifices offered on the altars, the circumcision of every Jewish male, the Passover, and other feasts of Israel pointed forward to the Christ to come. These were sufficient and effective by God's Spirit to instruct and edify the elect in the promised Messiah, by whom they had forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life (WCF 7.5).

In the New Testament the gospel bursts forth in all its glory. Though it is not like the glory of Solomon's temple, which could be seen outwardly, it has a far superior glory. The true temple arrived, radiating "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The sacrifices of the Old Testament were no longer needed. Christ, the final sacrifice, had fulfilled their purposes. The preaching of the word of God and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper proclaim the gospel to all nations superiorly (WCF 7.6).

The Story Is Christ-Centered

Jesus Himself tells us He is the central character of Scripture. In Luke 24 we learn of two disciples who were trying to put together the story of Jesus. They had been in Jerusalem and witnessed the events at the end of Jesus's life. Now they were on their way home

to Emmaus, and they were deeply distressed. Their hope had been deflated. They thought Jesus was the one to redeem Israel, but instead He was crucified and buried. Indeed, the tomb was empty, but Jesus was nowhere to be seen.

Jesus says to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25–27).

It was the privilege of not only these two Emmaus disciples to hear Jesus tell His story but also of the disciples who had been with Him during His earthly ministry. Luke tells us later in the same chapter that Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, everything written about Him in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. These things had to be fulfilled, and Jesus was telling them that He was the fulfillment (Luke 24:44–47).

Jesus is the second Adam, who did not sin but was obedient to death on the cross. He is the Seed of the woman, who crushed the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). He is the final Noah, who saved His people through the cross (Eph. 2:16). He is the final Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed (Acts 2:38–39; 3:25–26; Gal. 3:13–14, 29). He is the final Isaac, who was sacrificed for our sin. He is the final Passover Lamb (Ex. 12:13). He is the final sacrifice, whose blood atoned for our sins (Lev. 16:14–16). He is the final and perfect priest, who is greater than Aaron (Heb. 9:11–12). He is the true Israel, who was tested and tried in the wilderness and obeyed (Matt. 4:1–11). He is the one lifted up to deliver sinners from death (Num. 21:9). He is the Prophet greater than Moses (Deut. 18:15–22). He is the one who gives grace to covenant breakers (Deut. 27:1–26). He is the ark of the covenant and the blood on the mercy seat (Heb. 9:1–14). He is the true bread of life and the light of the world (John 6:48, 51; 8:12). He is the Commander of the army of the Lord (Josh. 5:14). He is the final Judge, who never fell into sin but delivered His people by taking their judgment for them (2 Cor. 5:21). He is the final kinsman-redeemer greater than Boaz (Ruth 3:12–13). He is the

final psalmist, who leads His people in praise to God (Heb. 2:12). He is the final Davidic king, who reigns in perfect justice and righteousness (John 18:37). He is the final Solomon, who is not only full of wisdom but is wisdom Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). He is the final Prophet, who suffered for His people and did so without opening His mouth in retaliation (Isaiah 53). And He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Ezek. 34:11–24).

Why a Biblical Theology of Prayer?

During my years of teaching the Bible to women, I have presented the time line of Scripture. I keep before my students the big story of Scripture—creation, the fall, redemption, and consummation. In between these big events I teach smaller events that occur throughout the history of redemption. My aim is for women to dig into the Bible, reading it chronologically and studying texts in light of their original context as well as in light of the redemptive-historical context. If they are studying the New Testament I ask them to flip back to the Old Testament, and if they are studying the Old Testament I ask them to turn to the New Testament. I want them to see how the texts of Scripture are related, how they hold together as one cohesive whole, and how Christ is the interpretive key. My aim is no different in this book. I have devoted our study to one theme, prayer, and trace it throughout redemptive history in order to show its progressive revelation throughout Scripture and how it is organically related to the whole story, with Christ at the center.

The study of biblical theology is simply interested in the history of the unfolding of redemption.³ The Bible is divided into different periods of redemption, such as creation, the fall, the flood, the call of Abram, the exodus from Egypt, and the coming of Christ. It focuses on the history and cohesion of Scripture with Christ at the center

3. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1975; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007), 14.

of it all. As we think about the importance of a biblical theology of prayer, we should remember several important things.⁴

First, our study is in the church and for the church. As we study with other believers, we are all edified and encouraged. A biblical theology of prayer isn't an end in itself. Its aim is to glorify God and enjoy Him as we come to know Him better through His word. As we come to know Him more, we grow in loving Him and our neighbor by the power of His Spirit at work in us.

Second, we learn to read the Bible chronologically. There's a narrative storyline of Scripture interspersed with commentary on the storyline. If you want to read the narrative storyline of the Old Testament, you would read Genesis through Judges, Samuel through Kings, Daniel, Esther, Ezra through Nehemiah, and then Chronicles. If you want to follow the commentary on this narrative, after reading Kings and before starting Daniel, you would read Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the Minor Prophets, Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations.⁵ If you want to read the narrative storyline of the New Testament, you would read the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation. If you want to follow the commentary on this narrative, after reading Acts and before reading Revelation, you would read Paul's epistles as well as the General Epistles.

Third, as we engage in a biblical theology of prayer, we become sensitive to the genres of Scripture and the biblical authors' intended meaning. We stop misunderstanding texts out of context and instead seek to understand what the author intended us to learn. This means we read poetry as poetry and wisdom books as wisdom books. We don't read apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel 7–10 and Revelation, as if we're reading the narrative of Numbers.

4. For a good definition of *biblical theology*, the one that informed my five points, see B. S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2000), 10.

5. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2003), 51.

Fourth, the overarching story is drilled into our minds as we study the theme of prayer in Scripture. This helps us have a biblical worldview in which to interpret all the events of our lives. This is our Father's world, which He created. On the one hand, we can affirm the goodness of the creation. On the other hand, evil, suffering, and sin are the result of the fall. But there's hope in the midst of this fallen world; the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, has come and inaugurated His kingdom and is coming again to consummate it.

Finally, our study of biblical theology exalts Jesus Christ. It is Christ-centered, meaning He is the hero of the story. "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

* * * * *

Do you like a good story? Look no further than Scripture. Don't delay digging in to study the theme of prayer. As we trace this theme throughout redemptive history in order to show its progressive revelation throughout Scripture and how it is organically related to the whole story, with Christ at the center, by God's grace, the majesty of His word will move and purify you. The consent of all the parts will comfort you, the scope of the whole will strengthen you, and its light and power will convince you of your sin and need of a Savior (WLC 4).



The Lord Who Calls

From Creation to the Fall

One of my fondest memories about dating my husband is how he initiated our relationship. He was very purposeful in his words and communicated his intentions clearly. I didn't have to wonder if he liked me or wanted to date me—or even if he wanted to marry me. He told me. He called me and asked me out. He spoke about his fear of messing up our friendship in order to find out if marriage was right for us. When the time was right, he spoke those words I had longed to hear: “Will you marry me?” And on our wedding day, he spoke words of commitment to me.

In our relationships we like other people to take the initiative in displaying their affection for us or appreciation of us. I still remember the email from an author and series editor who had reviewed one of my Bible study books and thought I was the woman to write one of the books in her series. That email meant so much to me. She had initiated a working relationship with me after exploring my work and invited me to partner with her in communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's likely you have your own stories of people who have initiated relationships with you. I hope the first relationship that comes to your mind is the one that the Lord God initiated with you when He called you to be His child. Do you remember your first prayer? Maybe it was a simple, “Help, I know I'm a sinner in need of grace. I want you to be Lord and Savior of my life.” Whatever the content of

your prayer, you talked with God! You wouldn't have done that on your own. He had to give you the grace to call on the name of the Lord. In other words, He called to you so that you could call on Him.

I read a book to my children titled *That's When I Talk with God*. I love the simplicity of it. It teaches my children that they can talk to God all day long about anything and everything. Scripture teaches us that the reason we can talk to God all day long about anything and everything is because He talked to us first. He pursued us so that we can pray. How beautiful is that? If you're looking for a reason to pray, look no further. The Creator has called to His creation. He wants a relationship with us.

The Beginning of the Story

In Scripture, the greatest story of stories, there are probably not many words more familiar to us than, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). In the first chapter of Genesis, as well as at the beginning of chapter 2, is the glorious account of God creating the heavens and the earth. It's a bit like an overview of a very important subject—an outline, if you will. But one part of the outline is so important that in chapter 2 God gives us more details. Just as we think the curtain is closing on the creation account, we read again about the creation of man and woman (vv. 7–25).

We already learned from Genesis 1 that the three persons of the Godhead "created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him" (Gen. 1:27). We also learned that "male and female He created them," and He blessed them and commissioned them (vv. 27–28). But in chapter 2 we read more details about God's creation of humankind: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7). Then, God put him in a place that He planted. This garden in Eden was filled with trees that the Lord God made to spring up out of the ground. They were pleasant to look at, and they produced delicious food. Two trees stood in the middle, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As Adam walked through the garden, not only would he have seen pleasant sights but also he would have

heard pleasant sounds. There was a built-in watering system, a river that flowed out of Eden and divided into four rivers.

In this place God purposed for Adam to work the garden and keep it. Such work would make any man hungry, and the Lord provided good food for Adam. The man could eat from every tree in the garden except one: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). This was more than sufficient, an abundance of food. No one could ever go hungry with such a steady supply of nourishment. There would never be a reason to eat of the forbidden tree because the man had plenty of luscious fruit from which to choose. Furthermore, eating fruit from the forbidden tree was deadly.

A Voluntary Relationship

How kind it was of the Lord to come to Adam in the garden and speak with him. He was not a Creator who left His creature alone to fend for himself. Instead, He voluntarily initiated a relationship with humankind by way of covenant. God wanted to speak with His creation. More amazingly, He desired His creation to speak with Him. The first covenant God made with Adam was the covenant of works. He gave Adam a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If Adam obeyed he would receive life, but if he disobeyed he would die. Adam was in a special position as the head of the human race. His choice affected all humankind. It sounds easy, right? Adam was in a pleasant place with fabulous food and serene sounds. His work was wonderful and his communion with the Creator perfect.

But something wasn't good. The Lord didn't like that Adam was alone. And after God gave him the task of naming all the animals, Adam probably realized he didn't like being alone. No animal that he named was like him. None of them walked or talked as he did. But when God put him into a deep sleep and made Eve out of his rib and brought her to Adam, he knew that she was like him. “*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*” (Gen. 2:23) he declared, as though he had been eagerly searching for a companion and, as he

named animal after animal, had become increasingly aware that one wasn't to be found. But God gave Eve to Adam at just the right time. And the two became the happiest married couple who have ever walked this earth. Their communion with their Creator and with each other was perfectly blessed. The Lord God talked with them and they talked with Him in the glorious garden.

A Breach in the Relationship

But one day something terrible happened. Someone other than God started talking to Adam and Eve. Satan, who had rebelled against God and become His archenemy, crafted deceptive words to speak to Eve. He questioned God's trustworthiness and goodness in order to get Eve (and Adam, who was with her) to question His trustworthiness and goodness. "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Gen. 3:1). Satan tempted them with words to partake of that which was forbidden to them: "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vv. 4–5). And instead of turning and talking with God, they turned and talked with the serpent. This decision cost them dearly. Adam and Eve fell into sin, and all humankind with them.

Their eyes experienced the effects of sin first: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Gen. 3:7). But then their ears experienced the effects of their sin—and how terrible it must have been! The sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, signaling them to come walk and talk with Him—a sound they used to love and anticipate—was now dreadful. Instead of wanting to hear His voice, they hid because they had listened to Satan's voice. "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden...[and they] hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (v. 8).

The Garden Courtroom

Surely the Lord God could have killed Adam and Eve on the spot, having never spoken another word to them. He certainly would have been right and just in doing so. But instead, the Lord called to Adam and Eve. They never would have called to Him. They were spiritually dead in their sin. They hid from the presence of the Lord. If the Creator was ever going to talk with His creation again, He would have to do the initiating. And amazingly, He did.

When the Lord God did speak to them, it wasn't the sound of a father calling to his children to climb on his lap to hear a story. It was the sound of a father who calls his children into the house to find out who has broken his belongings because they disobeyed his rules. It was the scene of a courtroom. The Lord God's question "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9) wasn't an invitation to enjoy a nice walk and talk with Him, but an exhortation to stand before the Judge, tell the truth, and plead guilty.

The Lord God addressed Adam first, the one with whom He had made the covenant of works. Adam was the head of his wife as well as of the whole human race. In a series of questions, the Lord God led Adam and Eve in confession of sin: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat? ...What is this you have done?" (Gen. 3:11, 13). It wasn't a model confession, to be sure. Adam blamed Eve: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (v. 12). And Eve blamed the serpent, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (v. 13). But even so, they admitted that they had disobeyed God. In this we see God's grace at work in the first two sinners' hearts. Sinners don't confess their sin naturally. They hide. But when the Lord God calls to His people, He gives them grace to see their sin, hate it, and forsake it.

Have you, dear reader, ever come before the Lord God and confessed your sin? Have you pleaded guilty? Have you asked Him to be your Lord and Savior? You don't have to hide because of your sin. The safest place to go when we sin is to the Savior. He pleads on our behalf so that we will not be guilty anymore. Do you have loved

ones, neighbors, or friends ensnared in sin? Why not stop right now and make 2 Timothy 2:25–26 a prayer: *Father, please “grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil,” who has taken them “captive... to do his will.”*

Good News in the Garden

How terrible it must have been for Adam and Eve to hear God speak the word “cursed” to the serpent (Gen. 3:14) and then to hear the consequences they would each face for their sin (vv. 16–19). And yet how hope must have filled their hearts when they heard Him say to the serpent,

And I will put enmity
 Between you and the woman,
 And between your seed and her Seed;
 He shall bruise your head,
 And you shall bruise His heel. (v. 15)

This is the first statement of the gospel in the Bible. The covenant of works was not the final and decisive covenant. As the Westminster Larger Catechism 31 says, “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.” Genesis 3:15 is an example of one of the promises by which the covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament (WLC 34). It was also administered by prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover, and other types and ordinances, which all foreshadowed Christ and were sufficient for that time in redemptive history to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Once Christ came, this same covenant of grace was and continues to be administered through the preaching of God’s word and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (WLC 35).

The Final Word

God always has the final word. Eve shouldn't have listened to the serpent, and Adam shouldn't have listened to Eve. They should have listened to God. When God had every right never to speak with them again, He instead spoke a word of grace. He would ensure that there would still be communion between the Creator and His creatures. He would make sure that His people would still be able to talk with Him. Yes, He had to drive them out of the garden. Yes, it would be a road of discomfort, disunity, difficulty, and death. But God would still speak with His people. The Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. The sinless One would sympathize with and save sinners. The suffering One would extend mercy and grace in time of need (Heb. 4:14–16). The Lord God would not stop calling to His people. And His people would begin to learn what it means to call on the name of the Lord.

* * * * *

When was the last time someone pursued you in a relationship because he or she valued you? No matter how great it made you feel, it pales in comparison to the significance of the Creator calling to you, voluntarily initiating a relationship with you, longing to talk with you. He doesn't leave us wondering if He likes us. We know He does. He has initiated a relationship with His people and secures it with the blood of His own Son, Jesus Christ. Won't you respond to Him by speaking with Him? Tell Him that you stand in awe of His character. Tell Him about the unkind word you spoke to your spouse, the test you cheated on, the ugly look you gave your child, the envy that filled your heart, the anger that welled up inside you, the lustful look you took at the screen or the neighbor, or the worship you gave to an object instead of to Him. Thank Him for the people He has put in your life, the places He has appointed you to serve, and the possessions He has given you. Talk to Him about the need you, your loved ones, friends, and neighbors have, asking Him to save the prodigal child, heal the cancerous body, restore a broken marriage, deliver a friend from an alcohol addiction, and empower a

missionary to proclaim the gospel clearly to a different people group. Don't hide in your sin and shame. Don't think He doesn't see you. He calls you by name. Run to Him and talk with Him. He is the Lord who calls and who cares.

Time to Ponder and Pray

1. Describe a time someone took the initiative in a relationship in order to display his or her affection for you or appreciation of you. How did it make you feel? How does it make you feel that the Lord initiates a relationship with you in which you can pray to Him?
2. How do you teach your children or the children in your church to pray? What would you say if someone asked you, "Why should I pray?"
3. What did you learn in the beginning of the story of Scripture that was new to you or that reminded you of something you had forgotten?
4. God voluntarily initiates a relationship with His people. Why does this motivate you to pray? How can you incorporate prayer into your daily life? How can you set aside a regular time to pray with your spouse, children, or a friend?
5. How has sin put a breach in the relationship between God and humankind? What has God done to bridge the breach?

6. Why does the good news that came in the garden (Gen. 3:15) comfort you? How could you use this verse to share the gospel with a friend?

7. How does it affect you to know that God is present with you in your discomfort, disunity, or difficulty and that He is ready for you to speak with Him?

8. Since God speaks to His people through His word, the Bible, why is it important to base your prayers on Scripture?

9. In light of what you've learned in this chapter, write out a prayer to God.

10. Seek to memorize 2 Timothy 2:25–26 so that you can use it often in prayer, as demonstrated on page 16.