Now Where Did I Put Him?

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One of the phrases I've probably said more than any other in my life is:

"Now where did I put that?"

I have what I like to call the gift of preoccupation.

I can put my keys somewhere perfectly logical, and five minutes later, that location has apparently been erased from human history.

My glasses. My phone. A book I was just reading. A piece of paper I absolutely could not lose.

The things I need most somehow end up in the most peculiar and apparently unforgettable places, and so I wander through the house asking:

"Where did I put that?"

This morning I was reading the second chapter of Luke when I came across a phrase that stopped me.

Mary and Joseph had been in Jerusalem for the Passover. When the celebration was over, they started home. They assumed Jesus was somewhere in the traveling company.

After all, He was twelve years old. Surely He was with relatives, friends, the other families making their journey back to Nazareth.

But after traveling for a day, they realized something:

Jesus wasn't there.

So they turned around. Yeah, they took a U-turn. They searched

for Him high and low, and Luke says:

“After three days they found him in the temple.”

After three days.

I read that this morning and thought, *I’ve heard that before.*

Three days.

I think you might know where I’m going with this.

Years later, another Mary would be looking for Jesus, and this time she knew exactly where He was supposed to be.

In a tomb.

Except He wasn’t there.

And that got me thinking.

Jesus Has Never Agreed to Stay Where We Put Him

Maybe one of the recurring lessons of the Gospels is this:

Jesus has never agreed to stay where we put Him.

Mary and Joseph assumed He was in the caravan, but He was in the temple.

And throughout His ministry, people were constantly trying to decide where Jesus belonged.

But He kept showing up somewhere else.

We put Him on the shore—

and He’s strolling across the water.

We put Him with adults—

and He’s blessing children.

We put Him with the Jews—

and He’s with a Samaritan woman.

We put Him with respectable people—

and He’s eating with sinners.

We put Him in the synagogue—

and He’s healing somebody, and He’s not supposed to be doing that.

He’s supposed to be *here*.

But He’s not.

He’s *there.*

We put Him at the head of the table, and—

wait a minute, where’d He go?

Oh.

He’s washing feet.

We put Him with the crowds, and—

wait, we lost Him again.

He’s slipping away.

He’s supposed to be in bed. For goodness’ sake, it’s four in the morning.

But He’s already got an appointment with His Father in a solitary place.

We think He should be on a stallion—

and He’s riding a donkey.

We put Him on a cross when we thought last week He’d be on a throne.

And finally, we put Him in a tomb.

We roll a stone across the entrance.

We seal it.

We guard it.

There.

Surely Jesus will stay there.

Or so they thought.

And three days later—

He’s gone.

Maybe the problem isn’t that we keep losing Jesus.

Maybe the problem is that we keep assuming He should stay where we put Him.

God Tore the Curtain

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this uncontainable God happened on Good Friday when the veil split from top to bottom.

It was like God was saying:

“There. I fixed that for you.”

God tore the curtain—

and we keep trying to sew new ones.

Curtains of race.

Class.

Denomination.

Politics.

Tradition.

Curtains that separate people who look like us from people who don’t.

People who vote like us from people who don’t.

People who worship like us from people who don’t.

People whose stories make sense to us from people whose stories make us a little uncomfortable.

We keep building dividing walls—

and Jesus keeps walking through them.

He walked through Samaria.

He touched lepers.

He welcomed children.

He spoke with women whom respectable men avoided.

He ate with people religious leaders considered unclean.

He put people at the same table who probably would never have chosen to sit together.

Think about it.

Matthew was a tax collector for Rome, and Simon had been a zealot.

That ain’t right.

One worked for the system.

The other wanted to overthrow it.

And Jesus said to both of them:

“Follow Me.”

That’s what Jesus does.

He crosses boundaries.

He tears curtains.

He walks through walls.

Where Will Jesus Lead Me?

And now comes the part that makes all of this more than a little interesting as we observe Jesus.

Christ lives in us.

We are His body.

We are His witnesses.

We’re His ambassadors.

Which means that following Jesus will eventually require us to follow Him across some boundary we would never cross.

Maybe toward someone we were taught to avoid.

Maybe into a conversation we don’t completely understand.

Maybe toward someone whose politics makes us uncomfortable.

Maybe toward someone from another denomination.

Another race.

Another social class.

Another generation.

Another story.

Because the question isn’t simply:

Where can I find Jesus?

The better question may be:

Where will Jesus lead me?

And I have a suspicion that sometimes He will lead us somewhere we never expected to go—

to love somebody we never expected to love—

to cross a boundary or a barrier we never thought we would cross.

And maybe that’s why my favorite Easter phrase is:

“He’s not there.”

Again, Jesus was exactly where He was supposed to be.

Maybe that’s still true.

If we’re looking for Him, we may find Him in the sanctuary.

But we also might find Him on the roadside.

At a dinner table.

In a hospital room.

Across uncomfortable divides.

Among the forgotten.

With the lonely.

Beside the person everybody else has passed by.

Jesus has never been very interested in staying where we put Him.

So discipleship means refusing to stay where people put us either.

The veil has been torn.
The tomb is empty.
Jesus is on the move.

And if we follow His lead, may we find ourselves carrying His grace into some very unexpected places.

So the next time I find myself wandering through the house asking,

“Now where did I put that?”

maybe I’ll remember this:

Jesus was never mine to put anywhere.

He is Lord.
He leads.
And my job is simply to follow.

Now I’m back to looking for my keys.

Take heart. Notice the scattered moments. Share the grace.

Listen to “Now Where Did I Put Him?”

Psalm 7 Reflection

Where do you run when life turns against you?

Psalm 7 is filled with conflict, accusation, and the longing for justice, yet beneath its turbulent surface lies an invitation to something deeper: refuge. Before David pleads his case, he runs to God. Before he asks the Lord to judge others, he opens his own heart to God's searching gaze.

In this guided reflection, we'll discover that the safest place is not a life free from criticism or conflict, but a heart sheltered beneath the righteousness of God. Together we'll move with David from distress to surrender, from self-examination to trust, and finally to quiet praise.

If you've ever felt misunderstood, unfairly judged, or weary from carrying the burden of defending yourself, may this meditation remind you that God is your refuge, your shield, and your faithful defender.

"O LORD my God, in You I take refuge." – Psalm 7:1

Find a quiet place and listen.

Happy 152nd Birthday to G.K. Chesterton

It was a dark and stormy night, as they say, when I arrived somewhere between sleep and fairy land. I finally got my chance to sit down with Gilbert. Today, he's 152 years old and he doesn't look half bad. In fact I think he may have lost a

few pounds since I last saw him.

“So — happy birthday, Mr. Chesterton. Any opening words for the occasion? You really look great after a century and a half!

“Praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul.” So yes — let’s begin with that.

I have to say, you seem unusually cheerful for someone who spends his days arguing about God and civilization.

Well, I’d put it this way: gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder. That’s not a bad posture for any day, let alone a birthday.

But gratitude requires humility, doesn’t it? And humility isn’t exactly fashionable.

It never was. People forget how to be grateful unless they first learn how to be humble. That’s the uncomfortable sequence.

Let’s talk about love for a moment. What’s the best way to love something — or someone?

Realize it might be lost. That’s the whole secret, really.

That’s beautiful. Also a little terrifying.

(He laughs as he enjoys a sip of something more Catholic than Baptist) Most true things are. But here’s what I’d add: an adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. Life is largely a matter of which direction you’re facing.

Before we go further — do you have any rituals? A way of preparing yourself before you work?

Oh, I say grace. Before meals, yes — but also before a concert, before the opera, before I open a book, before

swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, dancing. Before I dip the pen in the ink. The world deserves a little ceremony.

What is art, then? Is it ceremony?

Art is the signature of man. That's all – and that's everything.

And education?

Truth in a state of transmission. Simple as that. The problem is we've made it very complicated in order to avoid transmitting the most important part.

Which is?

That there is a whole truth of things, and that in knowing it and speaking it we are happy. You will not hear that in most public schools. You will hear a great many other things.

What happens to a culture when it loses its sense of the sacred?

Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural. And politically? Once you abolish God, the government becomes God. It's a very short step, and people keep being surprised by it.

So what is real freedom, in your mind?

The free man isn't the one who thinks all opinions are equally true – that's not freedom, that's feeble-mindedness. The free man is the one who sees errors as clearly as he sees truth.

How do we know right from wrong when everything seems negotiable?

Right is right, even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it. Fashions don't alter facts. Fallacies don't cease to be fallacies because they become fashions.

Do people still love truth, do you think?

Oh, yes. Even the liars love it. That's one of the more hopeful things about us.

Why do people seem so restless, then? So unsatisfied?

Because the most ignorant of humanity know, by the very look of the earth, that they have forgotten heaven. There's a shape missing, and they feel it without being able to name it.

Is faith part of the answer? Because some would say faith and reason are enemies.

Neither reason nor faith will ever die. Men would die if deprived of either. They're not enemies – they're two legs.

You spend a lot of energy defending things people find old-fashioned.

(He grabs my i-phone and throws it into a nearby trash receptical. At first I feel the need to protest, but it's Chesterton. I refrain and he grins)

The act of defending any of the cardinal virtues has today all the exhilaration of a vice. I recommend it highly.

We've had a lot of scandal in the church lately– lots of fighting, sexual misconduct, religious arguing, bigotry, and controvery. If we are call to be different why do we fail so magnificently as the Body of Christ?

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried. That's a rather important distinction.

You've been watching us from the heavenly grandstands for quite some time now. How does anyone stay upright in a confusing age like this one?

There are an infinity of angles at which one falls. Only one

at which one stands.

What makes a truly great leader?

There is a great man who makes every man feel small. But the real great man — the genuinely great man — is the one who makes every man feel great.

What is history trying to tell us right now?

That the story isn't finished. That's the most necessary and most neglected point about the whole business.

Any thoughts on poetry before we close?

Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.

…That's your contribution to literary criticism? It seems like our culture these days is constantly looking for amusement instead of God.

The unpardonable sin is being bored.

Last question. Why do angels fly?

Because they take themselves lightly.

And why do humans have such trouble getting out of bed?

Daybreak is a never-ending glory. Getting out of bed is a never-ending nuisance.

Mr. Chesterton, thank you. I must confess that compared to you, I'm a rather dull and unaccomplished writer. You lived life to the fullest, but you have inspired me today to make my work count for something.

(setting down his glass) There is no such thing on earth as an uninteresting subject. The only thing that can exist is an uninterested person.

Happy birthday.

For more, check out today’s Moments Almanac. https://www.buzzsprout.com/2602723/episodes/19241735

Hand Over My Mouth

There’s something in the core of most of us: a need to figure out who caused the mess.

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We start early. A broken vase, a quick denial—*“It wasn’t me.”*
And as we grow older, we just get more sophisticated with it.

We blame systems.
We blame people.
We blame entire groups we’ve never met.

Because if we can identify the cause…
if we can name the enemy…
we feel a little more in control.

But the world is still a mess.

And if we’re honest…
so are we.

There’s a line from the film Ordinary People that has always stayed with me:

> *“We would have been alright… if there hadn’t been any mess. But you can’t handle mess.”*

That line exposes something in us.

We want things neat.
Explainable.
Tied up with a bow.

But life doesn’t cooperate.

I’ve stood at gravesides where people tried to explain the unexplainable—
accidents, disease, loss that came too soon.

We reach for words.
We reach for meaning.

And when meaning doesn’t come easily…
we either blame, or we quietly disconnect.

Blame gives us something to hold—for a moment.
But it also builds a small, shrinking world where we don’t have to face the deeper mystery.

And if we stay there too long, something inside begins to decay.

Life isn’t clean.

It’s messy.

I’ve been in a delivery room.
There’s nothing neat about it—pain, noise, urgency, risk.

And yet… that’s where life begins.

I’ve also walked through cemeteries.
Everything in order.
Straight lines.
Quiet.

If I had to choose…

I'd rather be in the labor room.

Because you learn something there.

The book of Job is filled with voices trying to explain suffering.

Friends offering reasons.
Theories.
Answers to the question we all ask:

Why?

But the turning point comes when God speaks.

And when He does…
He doesn't offer explanations.

He asks questions.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"
"Have you ever told the sun when to rise?"
"Can you hold the stars in place?"

And suddenly, the conversation changes.

Job, who had been speaking and searching and questioning, says:

> *"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand… things too wonderful for me to know."*

And then—

> *“I put my hand over my mouth.”*

I know that moment.

When God speaks, my opinions start to sound small.
When God speaks, my need to explain begins to fade.

As Augustine of Hippo once said:

> *“If you understand it, it is not God.”*

And like a quiet hymn rising from another century,
Katharina von Schlegel reminds us:

> *“Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side;*
> *bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.”*

There is a strange kind of peace…
in not having to explain God.

In letting Him be God.

In handing over the gavel to the One who sees what we cannot.

I look at injustice—and He points to creation.
I worry about tomorrow—and He tells me to look at the birds.

And somewhere in all of that…

I stop talking.

I release the need to solve the mystery.
I let go of the blame.

And like Job…

I put my hand over my mouth.

Listen to the Episode

If this reflection resonates with you, I’d love for you to listen to the full episode of *Scattered Moments*:

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YOU Give them Something to Eat

On a Sunday morning in my small church, I walked into the worship center, and the youth minister pulled me aside and said, “Pastor Bob had a little emergency with his mom and dad

in Toledo. He flew out last night, and he asked me to preach, but it's been a crazy week and I'm totally gassed. Would you mind preaching?" The pre-service music had already started, and we were thirty seconds before the first song. He didn't wait for a response. He just walked up on stage to do the welcome.

Check Out this Post on Youtube

I was a little woozy. I had to sit down. I whispered to my wife, Darlene, "I have absolutely no idea what I'm going to do. He didn't even wait for an answer." I can speak, but I'm kind of a planner. Should I just say, *We're just going to worship, take up the offering, and pray?* I flopped my Bible open in the seat next to me. This fortune cookie approach to getting a word from God rarely works. Jesus speaks from intentional study, not just flopping the Bible open and reading the first thing. I tried that once during a difficult day with Darlene, and the red letter verse I read was, "Woman, why are you crying?" I didn't try to work that into the situation. But this time, the first red letter words my eyes landed on were these: "You give them something to eat."

It was from the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. The disciples were trying to get Jesus to make a public announcement that the multitude should go back home because the show was over, and they didn't have a fish and chips stand within ten square miles of the deserted place. But Jesus, the Creator of the universe, said casually to the disciples, "*You* give them something to eat."

That Sunday, I saw spiritually hungry people settling in for worship, and I had the spiritual equivalent of two eggs, a box of macaroni, a can of beans, and a three-year-old can of sardines. Lots of times I've heard Jesus whisper, *You give them something.* Why would an all-powerful God ask that of me? There are far better solutions out there! He wouldn't leave well enough alone. "You give them something." In these

moments, I do what we all do when Jesus asks and we say “yes”: I start looking for scraps of something to use, things I forgot that I had, crazy ideas, and risky moves that I’m hesitant to try. I offer it. He takes it. He blesses it. And amazing stuff happens. Here’s the thing: What I have is not extraordinary. Quite the opposite. It’s not extraordinary until He gets His hands on it. It’s just how the whole thing works. He wants to involve us in the process. It’s all Him, but we get to come along for the ride.

He does this all the time. Jesus whispers to the disorganized mom, the introverted hostess, the stuttering leader, the guy with a sketchy past, the penniless widow, the uneducated mentor, the overwhelmed dad, and the inexperienced coach, *You give them something.* Perhaps because when these people succeed, there will be someone saying, *If God could use that person, there must be something to this thing they call gospel.*

Jesus is with me…

If there is one axiom I come back to more than any other—one I find myself saying out loud when things start to tilt—it’s this:

Jesus is with me.

Not *it’s not over.*
Not *if I die, I die.*

Those are good words. They’ve got grit in them. But this one goes deeper.

This one holds.

Click to watch the video

When I’m over my skis.
When the diagnosis lands and everything shifts in a moment.
When a relationship fractures in ways I didn’t see coming.
When the darkness gets loud and starts telling its stories—

There is one truth that can carry the full weight of that moment:

Jesus is with me.

Because when that is true—and it is—what else is there?

What nightmare, what victory, what valley, what fire could possibly outshine the simple, steady reality of what He said:

> *“Lo, I am with you always.”*

About That Word

Now I know—*lo* doesn’t technically mean what I want it to mean.

It means *behold*.
Pay attention.
Look here.

But when I hear it, I can’t help it—I think of *low places*.

I think of valleys.
I think of those stretches of life where you can’t see ten feet ahead of you, where the road drops out and you’re left feeling your way forward.

And somehow… He’s there too.

I don’t know how this day is going to work out—but Jesus is

with me.
I've got that conversation I've been putting off—but Jesus is with me.
I don't know how the end of my story will unfold—but Jesus is with me.

That's the secret hiding in plain sight at the end of the Great Commission.

We read the command—go, make disciples, baptize, teach—and then we tend to rush right past the final line, as if it were a closing formality instead of the whole foundation:

> *"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
> *—Matthew 28:20*

It's not our talent that carries us.
It's not our intellect, or our abilities, or our strength—or even our best intentions.

It's not our looks—thank the Lord.

The secret is the **traveling companion**.

One Word

There's a story about G.K. Chesterton that I've never been able to shake.

He was stopped on a London street corner by a reporter who asked him:

"If the risen Christ appeared right now and stood behind you—what would you do?"

Chesterton didn't hesitate. He looked him in the eye and said:

“He is.”

That’s it.

Not a theological argument.
Not a carefully framed answer.

Just a quiet correction of reality.

Waking Up to What’s Already True

Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century nun who spent her life learning how to pray, wrote these words in *The Interior Castle*:

> *“We know quite well that God is present in all that we do. Our nature is such that it makes us lose sight of the fact. But the Lord, who is near at hand, awakens it.”*

That’s the whole thing, isn’t it?

We don’t conjure His presence.
We don’t summon Him with the right tone or the right words.

We **wake up** to it.

This isn’t magic.
It’s memory.

It’s the soul shaking itself awake to what is already, permanently, unchangeably true.

Say It Out Loud

There is no mountain, no fire, no villain, no diagnosis, no setback, no conflict that I will ever face alone.

Not because of who I am—

—but because of the One who is with me.

So when the day comes apart—and it will—say it out loud.

Say it in the car when you're gripping the steering wheel a little too tight.
Say it when the phone rings and you already know it's not good news.
Say it when you feel like you're fading, like you're disappearing into the noise of everything.

Say it until your heart catches up with your words:

Jesus is with me.

Not as a wish.
Not as a hope.

As a fact.

Lo. He is.

A Prayer

Jesus—

You said it plainly, and You meant it:
I am with you. Always.

Not until it gets too hard.
Not until we fail one too many times.

Not until we wander too far.

Always.

Teach us to live inside that word.
To say Your name in the dark and mean it.
To stop looking for You somewhere out ahead,
and realize You are already here—

already with us,
already enough.

Amen.

The Howling Black Dog and the Still Small Voice

Four Lessons for the Depressed from 1 Kings 19

Early in my ministry, I was serving as a youth pastor in Amarillo, Texas when I walked straight into a deep chasm of spiritual warfare. It was born out of too many promises, too many personal expectations, and a growing pile of disappointments. In the midst of all the victories I experienced back when I had less gray hair and more energy—lives changed, ministries growing—depression crept in like a snake in the castle of my personal world. And it whispered four words: Your ministry is over.

It was a difficult season. When I should have been in a place of rejoicing, all I could do was wish the journey of life was over.

Out of that time, I began to search the Scriptures and came

across a familiar passage about depression. It's amazing how when we search the Scripture, the Scripture begins to search us.

In 1 Kings 19, I met a strong and dynamic leader who had a limitless amount of faith—certainly much more faith than a twenty-six-year-old youth minister. He had seen fire from heaven. He had confronted kings. He had taken up the sword of spiritual warfare and knocked the foundations of idolatry across an entire nation.

And yet here we see this man, Elijah, being threatened by one vicious woman. After so many victories, how could this be? He escapes into the wilderness, collapses under a broom tree, and says, "Enough. Enough."

At first glance, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Jezebel doesn't even deliver the threat herself. She sneers to a messenger: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

And Elijah—the same man who had just called fire from heaven—was blanketed in fear. He ran. He told God, "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors." And then he fell under that broom tree in total, stark, deep, dark depression—and fell asleep.

You know the story. An angel comes, touches him on the shoulder, and says, "Get up and eat." Then this: "Your journey is too much for you." And Elijah was strengthened.

The lessons I see in this story are some of the best counsel for anyone going through depression—those who have entered into this unwanted fraternity. We often call it "that howling black dog." Sometimes it's acres away from your house. Other times, it's right at your doorstep.

1. God Meets Us in Our Exhaustion

The first lesson I've learned, especially through the story of Elijah, is that God meets us in our exhaustion. He doesn't rebuke us. He doesn't hand us a gym membership. He doesn't rattle off all the reasons we should buck up and feel grateful. He doesn't even begin by sharing great wisdom.

Elijah had just come off the spiritual high of Mount Carmel, where God's power was displayed and his enemies ran for the hills. But God met him there in his exhaustion—with care, not a lecture.

Sometimes the best thing we can do when we're depressed is to get away, eat some good food, drink some water, and have a nap. As one of my mentors once said—and I quote this because it is staggeringly profound—"The most important thing to do when you're exhausted is to get some rest." I know. Groundbreaking. But sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is sleep and eat. God addresses the physical before he addresses the spiritual.

With every battle, every trial, every failure, and every victory, our bodies take a blow. Those blows can cause us to stagger into a cave that no one wants to enter.

2. Depression Can Follow Our Greatest Victories

Elijah didn't fall apart during the contest with the prophets of Baal. His boldness allowed him to mock the idolaters to their face, making caricatures of their gods. If he spoke in English, let's just say his trash talk would have definitely made the highlight reel.

But the emotional crash after that intense battle didn't indicate a lack of faith. It indicated humanity. Elijah

realized that the power was never from him. It never was.

As we walk through depression, it’s important to realize that the same great power that can calm storms and move mountains is also the God who brings us face to face with our own humanity.

3. Isolation Distorts Our Perspective

We hear Elijah say to himself and to God, “I’m the only one.”

And the Lord responds—in this literal cave where Elijah spent the night—with a powerful question: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” That’s a question I think God asks us all the time. He asked it in the Garden. And he asks it of us. Where are you?

For those times when I’ve entered into depression, I’ve also heard that still small voice: Where are you, Matt?

I can relate to Elijah’s response. I’ve often prayed, “God, I’ve been faithful to you. I’ve been zealous for your name. And nothing seems to work.” Israelites will be Israelites, and the church will be the church. And we feel those words of Elijah: “I am the only one left, and now they’re trying to kill me too.”

But then God gives Elijah a reality check. He tells him to get out of the cave and go stand on the mountain. His voice seemed to say, “Look, you’ve done some amazing things, and I’ve been able to use you to advance my kingdom. But I want to tell you this: you’re not alone.”

There were 7,000 prophets who had not bowed to Baal. In America today, I think God would say there are hundreds of thousands of churches and millions of faithful men and women who serve him. The reality check of depression allows us to

see that it’s not on our shoulders. The battle doesn’t hinge on our strength to stand.

4. God’s Rescue Is Rarely Dramatic

And then the last thing I see in the Scripture—the one that helps me when that dog is at my doorstep barking and I’m huddled in the corner—is that God’s rescue is rarely dramatic.

He speaks softly. He speaks in a still, small voice. The wind, earthquake, and fire came, but God wasn’t in any of that. And then slowly, steadily, he begins to speak with a gentle voice. Not an accusing voice. Not a screaming voice. Softly. Carefully.

When we’re depleted, we may expect God to show up in spectacular ways—to rescue us from the waters like he did the children of Israel. But instead, he comes to us and invites us to rest, to get a bite to eat, to take one step and then the next and then the next. And sometimes that’s all you can do.

Don’t concentrate on next week. Just look at today. God didn’t give Elijah a five-year plan. It was just one assignment. Just one next thing.

If you’re feeling the slings of depression, I hope you’ll remember Elijah—a foremost prophet of God whose mighty deeds cover Sunday school walls everywhere. But the picture that has encouraged me the most is the one you won’t find on a flannel board: an exhausted servant who encounters God through a still, small voice.

Shut down the email. Turn off the TV. Get off social media. Have a good meal. Take a nap. And listen.

That’s not a complete prescription, of course. Those who are struggling with depression should seek all the tools that are available. All good gifts come from God—including connecting with a counselor, listening to wise counsel about medication,

and learning how to set boundaries. But those first three steps—eat, rest, and listen—will help you get back in the fight.

The Limping Prince at the King's Table

Coldplay's haunting anthem *Viva La Vida* tells the story of a king who has lost everything—once commanding armies and ruling cities, now reduced to sweeping the very streets he used to own. It's a portrait of reversal, of glory turned to ash, of a crown that couldn't save him.

When I hear that song, I think of Mephibosheth.

He was born into royalty—the grandson of King Saul, son of Jonathan, heir to a dynasty. He should have ruled. Instead, he was hiding in a forgotten wasteland called Lo Debar, crippled, broken, and waiting for the kind of knock on the door that only meant one thing in the ancient world—execution.

He used to be a prince. Now he was *sweeping streets he used to own.*

But then David came looking for him. And everything changed.

It's the story of Mephibosheth, a funny name for a powerful allegory of God's grace.

The Pursuit of Kindness

David had a heart to do kindness to someone in Saul's house. It would be easy for David to say, "I want nothing to do with

the memories of this brutal king who fought me at every turn, who pursued me without mercy, whose mental instability resembled a dark triad.” But instead, David goes in pursuit of kindness.

I am reminded of the generational curse. We were all once enemies of God. We came from a long line of sinners. And yet we were pursued.

Notice—it wasn’t Mephibosheth who inquired of David. David sought out Mephibosheth. A long time ago, God sought you. For some of us, He is still seeking. For others of us, we have forgotten the fact that we were immobile because of our sin and our shame.

The Wages of Sin

In the ancient culture, Mephibosheth would be executed. I’m reminded that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

The fact that Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet reminds us of our own helplessness. He can’t defend himself. He can’t advance himself. He can’t inherit anything on his own, because his life is bankrupt—just as our lives are bankrupt.

No Pasture

Mephibosheth lives in a land called Lo Debar. That name means “no pasture, no word.” In other words, he is living in a state of wilderness where there are no green pastures and still waters. There is no word.

I know that I have often experienced seasons when the voices of my life grow silent and there is no word for me.

And yet the first word that Mephibosheth hears is: **“Do not**

fear.”

This is the gospel. We have nothing to fear.

Gospel Language

Throughout the story of Mephibosheth, we hear gospel language. There is no condemnation. There is only great grace.

Mephibosheth calls himself a dead dog—broken, worthless, forgotten. **But God.**

Paul captured this same reality when he wrote:

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!” —Ephesians 2:1-5 (CSB)

It was David who found Mephibosheth, restored his land, his security, and gave him a seat at the table.

King David said, **“You shall always eat at my table.”**

This is not a probationary period. This is not a temporary reprieve. No, this is permanence. He eats at the king’s table.

Hidden Beneath Grace

But notice—he’s not healed. He remains lame. He continues to be broken. And I find that one of the most encouraging details in the entire story.

Grace doesn’t erase our brokenness, but it covers it.

Mephibosheth still limps to the table. Every single day he makes his way into the king’s presence with that same halting, uneven gait—the limp that tells the story of everything he lost, everything he couldn’t fix, everything that remains undone in him. And yet the seat is still there. The table is still set. The king still welcomes him.

I know that limp. I live with it daily. The same struggles that marked me before grace found me have a way of following me still—the same patterns, the same weaknesses, the same uneven stride. Some days I arrive at the king’s table barely holding it together, wondering if this is the day the invitation gets rescinded.

It never does.

Because the miracle of grace isn’t that it makes us suddenly whole on this side of eternity—it’s that it covers what remains broken. His feet are hidden beneath the tablecloth, and ours are too. We are welcomed not because we have healed ourselves but because the king himself made a way. We still limp. But we still feast.

Our feet are covered and hidden under the table of grace. His feet are hidden beneath the tablecloth, and ours are too.

Thank God for grace. Thank God for Mephibosheth, who personified the state of every human that ever existed on this planet—except One.

Lessons on the X-15

When I was 3, I had an X-15.

Picture a small trike with more noise than brakes — and a whole lot of reckless joy.

I loved racing down hills on that thing — the wind in my face, the rattling wheels, the rush of freedom.

But I had one problem: I didn't trust the pedals to slow me down. Instead, I'd press my shoes against the concrete. It worked… sort of. But it shredded my sneakers and bloodied my toes.

It drove my mom crazy — but it did keep me out of her hair. 🙂

My parents told that story for years…

it revealed something true about me:

I've always tried to control the uncontrollable.

I love adventure… to a certain point of fear.

Fear is a balancing act.

It's good to have fear — otherwise, we might manufacture our own premature demise. (Like racing your X-15 off a ledge into oncoming traffic.)

But fear can also keep us inside.

Keep us fortifying our overblown rainy-day funds.

Keep us binge-watching the latest on Netflix.

Keep us blaming people, parties, and our own pitiful limitations.

And keep us from ever testing the thrill of the X-15 we call life.

We try to control pain – both the kind we feel and the kind we cause.

We try to manage our image and outcomes.

Sidenote: Sometimes we even try to manage God's image – keeping Him neat and predictable– a Sunday School friendly version rather than this boundless ground-shaking Savior.

The Lion will not dwell in our cage.

Safety can be appreciated,

but life won't stay inside the lines. Collisions happen. Hearts break. People disappoint us.

And yet – this is where life actually begins.

To avoid the mess, we turn to our self-invented tools:

People-pleasing.

Perfectionism.

Escapism.

Addiction – the "easy button" we press to avoid our deep need for connection.

They promise relief, but they deliver isolation.

The truth is, life with Jesus isn't tidy. It's wild. It's unpredictable.

It's the rush of the hill – with a Savior who says, "Trust Me. Don't drag your feet."

Surrender isn't giving up; it's opening up.

It’s connection. It’s risk. It’s grace.

Maybe the invitation today is this:

Trade your torn shoes for courage.

Stop trying to control the ride.

Be like Jesus— Live without cages.

There are no cages in heaven — and the only ones here are the ones we build ourselves.

I’m still that kid on the X-15, learning (again) how to let go and trust the wind.

I want to live like Jesus lived— Cage Free.

The Natural & The Gospel

After heart of Redford’s passing, my mind wandered back to my sophomore year at Louisiana College, when I stepped into a darkened theater at the Alexandria Mall to watch “The Natural.” With just a couple of teenage months to spare I was captivated by what seemed like a simple story about baseball and second chances. Now, in the seventh inning stretch of my life, I approach the film with different eyes and accumulated experience. Perhaps the greatest revelation I’ve discovered is the Christ figure that emerges in fleeting glimpses throughout the movie through the character of Roy Hobbs.

Baseball has always been fertile ground for mythic tales and mind-bending consequences—from the ball slipping through Bill Buckner’s legs, to the limping gait of Kurt Gibson as he rounded the bases in the Dodger’s World Series, to the Babe

pointing to the stands before his legendary home run. This week, I streamed the movie again, drawn perhaps by nostalgia and the timeless pull of great storytelling. As with any great movie, I discovered new layers I had never noticed before, or perhaps had never spent time truly contemplating. Mythological and biblical imagery abound in ways that are both subtle and profound. I'm sure I'm not nearly the first to notice them and I made a point not to Google it. I will after writing this.

I was particularly struck by the scene between The Judge and Hobbs, where Roy is tempted to throw games for money. The parallel to Jesus's forty days in the wilderness became unmistakable. "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'" (Matthew 4:8-9). The Judge's seductive offer mirrors Satan's temptation precisely. His promises of money and comfort strikingly reflect this biblical encounter.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/D69ShXtN__s?si=FPjkg86hB5iGKj7a
The lightning bolt serves as perhaps the film's most potent symbol of supernatural power. Born from a tree struck by lightning, Roy's bat—Wonderboy—carries mythic significance. The wooden bat itself echoes the cross, an instrument of both destruction and redemption. When his teammates become captivated by Roy's miraculous performances and choose to stitch lightning bolts on their jerseys, it mirrors the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), each carrying forward the symbol of transformation.

Roy's rejection of pure materialism echoes Jesus's response: "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). His choice to pursue his calling rather than wealth reminds us of Philippians 2:7, where Christ "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant," choosing mission over

personal gain.

The silver bullet piercing Roy's side from the mysterious Harriet Bird echoes the fate of a more perfect One: "Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19:34). After years of silence and exile, Roy emerges—much like Jesus striding out of the wilderness to begin his ministry. This resurrection motif transforms Roy from a fallen hero into something approaching the sacred.

Roy's teammates become his disciples of sorts, transforming from a ragtag squad of nobodies into followers of a champion. There's something profound about his mysterious, late arrival to the scene—Roy Hobbs seems to be on a divine mission, just as "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:13-14).

https://www.youtube.com/embed/Y1pgp1BOqqM?si=TbRHpo6Ld2B9vmPY
The film's ending offers perhaps its most heavenly imagery: Roy playing catch with his son in golden, almost ethereal light. This scene suggests paradise regained—all relationships restored, all purposes fulfilled. It evokes the promise found in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." I couldn't help but think of my own father and all those who have passed before us, and the promise that we will all gather together again in that perfect light.

The Imperfect Savior: Certainly, there are profound differences between Roy Hobbs and the figure of Christ, even in metaphorical terms. Roy was full of pride, experienced a devastating fall, and struggled with very human weaknesses. Yet perhaps this is where the metaphor becomes most powerful—it places us in Roy's shoes. Like the apostle Paul,

we can say: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15). We are often attacked, frequently tempted, and sometimes betray those we love most.



The story of redemption echoes through the longings of our own hearts and lives, reminding us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Roy Hobbs is not Christ, but he points us toward Christ. His story reminds us that even the fallen can rise, even the wounded can heal others, and even those who have lost everything can find their way back to grace. In the end, “The Natural” offers us more than entertainment—it provides a glimpse of the gospel played out on America’s most mythic stage.

The metaphors may be imperfect, but they are undeniably present, woven throughout the film like threads of gold catching light in unexpected moments. Sometimes the most

profound truths come to us not through sermons or scripture alone, but through the stories that capture our imagination and refuse to let go.

Mr. Redford, I don’t know if I’ll see you in the life to come. But I want to thank you—for bringing Bernard Malamud’s story to life with such care, dignity, and beauty. Through your performance, you gave me another glimpse of the gospel. Another reminder that even in a game, even in a story, we can catch sight of something eternal.