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Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

God's Story, Our Story

Selected Scriptures

Steve Aurell

February 21, 2010

series: Bookends: The Story of Creation & Consummation from Genesis & Revelation

My name is Steve Aurell for those of you that don't know me. I've been coming to CPC for 18 years and I've been on staff for 14 as Director of Care Ministries. This ministry revolves particularly around recovery. My heart really bleeds recovery red. And the counseling ministries, they're under my overseer too, so if you have biblical counseling needs, that's part of what we do at the Foster City campus. I also have the marriage enrichment ministry so for those of you who are struggling with your marriage and if there are conflicts there, we have various supports and conferences that we do. On occasion we actually have a marriage mentoring ministry for those of you who want somebody who may be a little bit more seasoned than you, give you the layout of the land. And finally the Mercy Ministry falls under my care as well. That's a ministry that deals with both in-house and out-reach needs on a very practical level. If you have prayer needs, if you have seasons in your life where you've just come out of the hospital, or you're just having a hard time, shut-ins, convalescent care, all that falls under Mercy. The Meals Ministry comes out of Mercy Ministry, and there's a variety of outreach projects that we do. So my plate is pretty full.

One thing I recognized when I came in this morning was that my heart is really thirsty and how I know that is when the spirit of God descends, when the spirit of God reigns, in whatever vehicle He chooses, and particularly this morning during the worship. God just started to touch my nerves and open up those empty places within me that are so thirsty for the thing that only He can provide – His living water in the midst of my soul. So I'm appreciative of that this morning. I hope that you are sensing God's presence in your life in that same way.

This morning I don't have a fancy three-point sermon. I haven't brought any slides. I really want to tell you a simple story, and I think it's God's story. It's a story that you know. It's a story that you've heard. But it's a story that's also so brilliant, multifaceted, and I would even say counterintuitive, that it bears repeating time and time again. It's also a story that God wrote before the mist of eternity and is now rewriting His script, His words. He authored that in the very beginning, and now He is rewriting our stories to line up with His, regardless of where you are, regardless of the struggles that you contend with in your everyday experience, regardless of the brokenness in your own heart, regardless of those times where you're weak and fragile, despite your best efforts to move in a way that honors God. He is present in the

midst of the script that He is rewriting within each and every one of us, and so I want to tell that story.

I want to give you a sense of who I am and how God has done the work that He has done to bring me to the place that I am today. I'm very grateful and I stand here before you a broken person saved by God's grace, and I like to say with a whole lot of help from fellow travelers, seasoned travelers that walked before me through various seasons in my life where I was challenged. So I stand before you this morning in a place of humility because I realize there's very little that I did. It has much more to do with the work that God did in the very beginning and continues to do within me.

So this story really begins in the creation narrative. We've been doing a bookends series —Genesis and Revelation. I want to give you a sense of that too, but I'm going to come at you in a kind of macro perspective rather than a micro perspective because I believe that there are themes that we see throughout the Bible that we can all identify with that really define for us our humanity, the brokenness of our humanity, and the greatness of our God. So this story begins in a Genesis narrative. We go all the way back to Genesis 1 and 2, and we see this great picture of the first man and woman in perfect harmony with not only God's creation but in perfect relationship with Him. He had created them in His image. In other words, He created them to really reflect His glory, to worship Him, and to reflect His relational designs in all that they do and say.

We see this beautiful picture in the garden. We see a picture of the first man and woman naked and unashamed. I can't imagine in my mind what they would look like. I don't know what your experience is, but there are so many coverings that I put over my weaknesses. There is so much vulnerability within my human experience that I want to keep hidden from you because I'm not sure what you're going to do with that. In this particular place in history, there were no protective barriers. There was no concealment, nothing to separate them from the intimacy that they shared, one with another, and the intimacy that they shared with God. It's a beautiful picture.

Then we see in Genesis 3 what happened with that picture. The serpent came into the garden, more crafty than any snake the Lord God had made, and he deceived Eve. He deceived her by half-truths. He deceived Eve by pointing to the one thing that God had strictly forbidden. This is the same way that God works

in the garden of our own hearts today. Satan comes into the garden of our lives and says, Hey, God said that you can have all of this. All of this is yours. He points to that one limitation that God has restricted for our protection and care. And because we feel needy, because we feel a sense of deficit, we buy into the lie that if we attach our basic longings that we're designed to honor God in our experience and to reflect them one to another, if we attach them to the things of the world and gain a sense of instant gratification there, then all will be well. So we're duped in the same way.

What we see in the Genesis narrative, especially in Genesis 3, is this total reversal of the created order. They were naked and unashamed before the fall. Now they fashioned loin cloths to cover up their weaknesses and their vulnerabilities, and we've been doing the same thing ever since. They became prone to self-centeredness. They blamed others rather than accepting responsibility for the choices that they made. There is great relational discord within that relationship between Adam and Eve from that point of time, great futility in finding their true place before God and each other.

I think that in a lot of ways we bear the marks of what happened in Genesis 3 today. I certainly see the self-centeredness within me. God has done great work in that area, but often times what I see is God created me in **His** image and then I go ahead and I return the favor. I want to recreate Him in **my** image. Rather than be concerned about how God can fashion me, I'm more concerned about how I can shape you to line up with my agenda in my life. That's a mark of the fall. There is a sense of shame and we've been hiding ever since; so fearful that our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities will be exposed.

We see this especially when we do something stupid, like when I yell at my daughter. I'll misdirect my anger at her, and right away I get that ummmm, and the first thing I want to do, my natural instinct, is to hide it away, not allow it to come up to the light, not confess my sin. Then it's so easy for me to blame her. Well honey, you know if you had just made your bed, if you had put your clothes away in the closet like I asked you, then I wouldn't have gotten angry with you. You know how difficult it is for us to own responsibility, how easy it is for us to look for a very convenient scapegoat, and all blame is a way of deflecting the consequences of our actions. It's a way to avoid the pain of self-examination, and we see that with the fact that when God comes back into the garden He lays judgment on both Adam and Eve and He tells Eve, ***"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you'll bring forth children, yet your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."*** So you ladies, what this is saying is that your brokenness will tend to be turned towards your husband for approval, and you will suffer in your motherhood like the pains of childbirth for the rest of your days.

Then He turns to the man and says, ***"Cursed is the ground because of you, in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."*** This makes sense to us men. It's so easy for us to see what we tie our identity to. We tie our identity into our work, into the futility, the absolute futility of our labor, by the sweat of our brow. We're geared that way. So we see these marks of death in our everyday experience. Christ has come. He's done a redemptive work in each and every one of us here, and yet we will still bear those marks in our humanity.

The rest of the Old Testament is, I think, a very simple story, one that we can all relate to. So as you fast forward from the Genesis account, what you see is this compulsive, I would even say addictive, cycle where the nation of Israel turned towards God for fulfillment and hung out there for a while and experienced a lot of His blessings. God showered blessings upon them and then they always seemed to turn away, didn't they? They found themselves at some mysterious place where they were sacrificing their worship, who they were before God, to idols. So God does a great work as He does in each and every one of us. He sends interventionists.

Throughout the Old Testament stories, He sent great men of faith, the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – people like Moses, people like Joseph. He sent judges, He sent kings, He sent prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah in order to carry a message back to His chosen people—you're going the wrong way. Repent. And that's all repentance means—reverse the course of your life. You're thinking that the water is over there, but it's over here. So turn around. We see them turning around and they come back to the Lord, to God the Father, and then they fall away, just like we do over and over again.

And there's this 400 years of silence of Malachi. It's a time of great anticipation. The deep cry of the heart for the nation of Israel at that point asks God, where are you? It was a time of silence. God had not spoken to His people. Can you imagine what that would be like? Some of us understand that experience. Some of us know the darkness that comes as a result of the things that we've turned our affections over to, the things that we've held up as idols in our lives and become in a sense ruled by them, until we reach a place of incomprehensible demoralization, where there is no light, and we have no hope.

When I think of Haiti and what's going on there, I think that's a graphic physical illustration of what that 400 years of devastation looks and feels like. Maybe you've experienced that. Maybe that's one of the reasons that you're here today. You're tired of living that way, you're tired of being caught in this compulsive kind of addictive cycle in your life, with the very thing that you think is going to bring you satisfaction and gratification leaving you empty, and you come in this morning and your heart and

your soul and your spirit is parched and thirsty. 400 years God was silent. The Old Testament story ends on that note.

Then the beauty is that in the midst of that darkness, God is not only an 11th hour God, he shows up in various ways. I wish that I could stuff that in a Coke bottle. Whenever I need it, I could like pop the cork and, bam, there would be a fresh infilling within my spirit. But He showed up, as He still shows up today, in ways that we least expect.

Now for me, I see the scripture as not only a narrative of how God created the world and where He's taken the world, but I see it as my story. Thankfully, I'm not living out of the Old Testament story anymore. But it is a story that has great significance in my life, like Adam and Eve in the garden after they fell, experiencing all the self-centeredness, the shame, the blame, the controlling kinds of behaviors and the pattern, the compulsive pattern that you see that stem from that day in history.

My own life took on a contour that was utterly destructive. Very early in life, I turned my affections, I turned the worship of my heart, over to things that had the capacity to rule me. Before that happened, I can remember making a decision, a child's vow you could say, the very heart of where I was living at that point, and the child's vow went something like this. It said, this environment, this family, is no longer something that I can trust for my growth. And you see what happens is the same thing that happened with Adam and Eve. When we're not reliant upon God by default, the only place that we can go is to become self-reliant. I had to create my own rules. Because I couldn't trust in the providence of God or His provision of my family or anything like that, I had to work it out myself. I saw what was right in my own eyes and I followed that into some very destructive ways.

Very early in my life I turned my affections over to drugs and alcohol. By the time I was 14 years old I was a full-blown heroin addict, running amuck on the streets of San Francisco, involved in a lot of criminal activity. I was brought into the juvenile system at 14 and from that point I never went back home, ever. When I got out of that system, I went back to what I knew. We certainly see this in the Old Testament story. They continued to do what was right in their own eyes. They kept going back to those same idols. I did the same thing over and over again. And I got caught in a compulsive, addictive cycle that absolutely devoured me. By the time I was 14 I was mainlining heroin. I got myself involved in a lot of criminal activity, petty thefts, and a little con game. By the time I was 18 years old, my disease had progressed to the point that I was pulling armed robberies. I was in San Francisco City Jail with 5 robbery charges, looking at 5 to life on each one of those. I went to prison and got out in 7 years. Guess what I did? I went back to the very thing that I knew.

You would think that I would have woken up and said, hey, something's wrong with this behavior, and maybe I need some

help, maybe I need some guidance to sort this thing out and try and do it a different way. But that was the last thing on my mind. So I went from the California system into the Texas system. I was down in Texas from 1975, picking cotton for the big boss man until I got out on December 8, 1992. I had spent 13 years, with a little month in between, locked up and at the end of that time when I was released, after all the experience of that kind of environment, I had no clue how to live out here.

I remember the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* and all those guys who got paroled after doing all that time. That's what I felt like. I felt so out of sorts. I didn't know how to change money. Driving in a car was different. I was used to control. I was used to that kind of system. I had three hots and a cot and that was good with me. The other thing that I recall during that period of time is I had this immense sense of shame because that environment had shaped me in such dramatic destructive ways that I didn't know how to sit and talk with you. What am I going to talk about? The kind of time I did? The people that I ripped off? The places I went to? The things that I did? I had no conversation outside of that context.

So I came back from the Texas prison system to California. I was able to stay out of prison for a long time, probably about 6 years. And eventually because there wasn't a change at a spiritual level, I wasn't seeking guidance to do it any other way, I ended up right back in the California system for another 4 years. And that's when that 400 years of Malachi hit me. I was at San Quentin. It was the last little term that I did. Something inside of me was starting to break, and I became aware of fear and the fear had a voice and it said, you know what, you don't want to go out this way. You're already a three-striker, so you're probably going to die in prison and you're going to die alone. That's not what I wanted to do.

I was in the upper yard at San Quentin and from Death Row, they were bringing the Death Row convicts down to go into the infirmary and whenever they did that, they had them zoot-suited, ankle-shackled, waist-chained, and they had gunas on both sides. And when I talk about gunas, I'm talking about jailers. It's not a derogatory term so if there are any policemen in here, I apologize! They were bringing them across the upper yard; it was dead-man-walking. And God took opportunity with that and all of a sudden I started to look at what was going on with these people and God was saying, Hey dude, wake up, wake up. That's fixin' to be you. I heard the sentence of death inside my spirit and it frightened me. It was almost as if I was crossing this invisible line and if I kept doing what I did, there would no longer be any chance whatsoever for anything different. So for the first time in my life, 40 years old, I sought help and came here to San Mateo County, one of the very few counties where I didn't have any wreckage.

This is when things began to change for me. I got myself involved in a spiritual process at that point. It wasn't a Christian process, but it had Biblical principles, and the first part of that process was to acknowledge my brokenness, my utter bankruptcy and powerlessness before God. You would think that after all I had been through, that would have been an easy admission for me. It wasn't. I knew that my life was unmanageable. They had central files thicker than telephone books documenting that fact. But for me to admit weakness, for me to admit powerlessness, wasn't something I could do. My whole identity had been tied to being strong—just suck it up, move through it, don't show fear, never acknowledge pain. That's the way I dealt with life all the way up to that point. So what happened is God did an intervention for me just like he did intervention with the nation of Israel and probably your life over and over again. Maybe there were times that you listened, and maybe there were times that you didn't. For me, He had to take this donkey behind the woodshed and smack me upside the head with a 2 x 4. I call those love taps today. That's the way He got my attention.

I was working for a woodcutter in Belmont and I was in a recovery treatment facility. I had to make some money to pay rent there. At the end of the day I finished cutting up this cord of wood and I put it in his truck. I wanted to get paid, I was very tired, and he said he didn't have any proceeds to pay me. So I copped a little attitude with him and he said, hey, just jump into this truck, ride shotgun with me over to Memorial Park in La Honda. I'll sell this cord of wood, kick you down the proceeds of the sale, and I'll take you back to your treatment facility. I said, cool. So I got in this old rickety '64 Ford half-ton pickup truck. It had over a cord of wood in the back. We're going up over Highway 84 on the down side of 84 towards Memorial Park, Pescadero Creek Road. If you've ever been down in that territory, down by YMCA Camp and Jones Gulch on the down side, it has some very steep hairpin turns. And this guy loses his brakes and bails on me!

So now I'm in a runaway truck with no brakes and no driver. That's when I understood what it meant to be powerless. You see, I've got this amazing mind that thinks it can figure everything out and work the edges, navigate the terrain according to my resources. By this time the truck was gathering up speed, maybe 35-40 miles an hour, and I got out of the truck, stood on the runner and I surveyed the territory. I'm going to find this perfect little bush. It's going to be so pretty. I'm going to do this wonderful little dive, kind of do a tuck-and-roll thing, brush myself off and I'm going to be okay. And that's when I realized how insane my thinking was. All my life I thought that I could work the edges and I could control certain outcomes if I was just slick enough to do so. Maybe some of you can relate.

Well, I took that leap of faith that's impossible for people like me to do unless you're in a situation like that. Isn't that great of God? He put me in a position where the only alternative was to

trust Him. So I'm on this runner. I take this little jump at about 40 miles an hour. My left leg hits the shoulder of the road. I hear the snap and I'm catapulted over the cliff. I don't remember going down. I lost consciousness going down. I remember waking up at the bottom of the cliff. I was on my back, my head was downhill, and the first thing that I became aware of is something really heavy on my chest. When I opened my eyes, I thought that it was my left torso from this hip down. I had snapped the femur and it was protruding out my thigh and it was thrown over my right shoulder going downhill. I was wrapped around myself like some kind of pretzel and I knew I was going to die. It made perfect sense.

Here's my thinking at the time: God, now I understand what you've been trying to tell me all my life. Now I understand that there are consequences in regards to the choices that I've made, the people that I've hurt, the things that I've done. Now I understand that there is a cost to the forgiveness that I never accepted, never asked for, never gave. And as I looked at the certainty of my death, I submitted my life to God in prayer. I didn't grow up in Christian home. Nobody sat down with me and talked to me about the power of prayer or spiritual disciplines. If they had, I probably wouldn't have listened anyhow. That's just how rebellious I was. But when I went to God, it wasn't a fancy prayer; it was one of those deep guttural prayers. Maybe some of you have experienced that. That deep surrender, that deep groan, that deep sigh which says, help me, please. All I can tell you is at that point something came into my life and it was electric and it didn't matter. From then on what happened to me, I knew I was home, whether I lived or whether I died.

Stanford Hospital came and got me off that cliff in a Lifeline helicopter. The last thing I remember was that they were running me down the corridor of Stanford Hospital in a gurney and I went out. I was in ICU for a long long time. Other people have had to fill in the blanks for me. What I could recall was that people would come into ICU and they would pray with me. What I do remember is that when I came out of that, that sense of God's presence in my life was still there. And for a person who hadn't cried in 40 years, the floodgates came open, yet they weren't tears of self pity. I was grateful. I was so thankful that I had another chance. My whole life from that point on became a process of learning how to walk again. The physical part for me was easy. The spiritual, the mental, the emotional, the relational, all the wreckage that I had in my life needed to be worked out over a period of time.

God takes us "as is." If you go to a used car lot and you buy a car as is, you're probably bound to get some defects in there. But He takes us as is. Sometimes He breaks us in order to remake us into the kind of people that can then reflect His character in all that we do and say. That's His purpose. He was there all along. I just wasn't listening.

So the next part of the story, chapter 1, the Old Testament story, is closed. The New Testament begins. This is a good thing. And we read that we're a new creation. Behold, the old has passed. The new has come. Now here we're not talking about just a little tune up or adjustment. It's much deeper than that. When Christ comes into a life by virtue of the new birth, He performs a creative act. It is a miracle of metamorphosis. Inside-out transformation. All the time I was looking for an outside-in transformation, thinking that something, that just the right person, or the right job, or the right whatever....fill in the blanks, then I would be okay. We're talking about an inside-out transformation. So just as a caterpillar's entire body dissolves in its cocoon and it's restructured into a butterfly, so all our old value systems at this place begin to dissolve and then become restructured around Christ. In short, He begins to rewire our desires.

So that's the new birth within us. But we also find that we, although this process is happening, haven't appropriated it all yet, so our identity in Christ is first and foremost. I had a lot of great people come alongside me and help me and tell me, you are no longer this addict that runs amuck in people's lives. You are now a child of God. He is very proud of you. You are precious in His sight. There was a long period of time where I was saying, wow, this feels really weird. You know, I'm not sure that I can really hold onto that in regards to who I am. Someone once said that we think that we have to change the way that we behave in order to be different, but God says no, I've made you different and when you begin to believe that, you automatically begin to change. So our actions always proceed from who we think that we are.

Ephesians 1 and 2 tells us about who God is, the spiritual blessings that we have in Him and what we have inherited as a result of the work that He's done in our lives. And why is that foundational? Because of the ethical commands that come at us in chapter 4 where Paul calls us to turn away from certain behaviors. Put off the old man, he tells us. Put on the new. It is a process that goes on throughout our lifetime. That is practical repentance at its best. So now no longer am I going to the street corner. No longer am I hanging out with gangsters. No longer am I driving Harley-Davidsons with bandanas and all of that stuff. No longer am I swearing. Now I'm doing these other things instead. And as we lean into that, as we act according to His blueprint in our lives, He begins to change us from the inside out. When we act on those precepts, those laws, those principles, we actually reinforce who we truly are now in Christ.

But the thing that really kind of confounded me is, and maybe some of you have felt this way and one of the reasons that I want to give you a bigger vision of God's story in your life is because, isn't it true that when we're challenged in certain ways when we go through dark nights of the soul, when stuff comes up in terms of our own flesh and we can't sort it out, and all of a sudden

our hope becomes really diminished, and it is very painful to live there, don't we get tunnel vision? And it is at that point that at least in regards to my experience, what I'm doing is I'm looking at my circumstances rather than God's ability to change my circumstances. So I get hooked into that.

I can remember, I had some pancreatitis attacks some years ago and after my last one I was walking down by the water and I could remember I was just in so much pain. I was walking and my mind was just all absorbed into this whole series of attacks that I had for four years, I thought I was going to die. I thought God was taking my ministry from me, and that was giving me great anguish inside. I was losing my hope. It was a dark day; there were dark clouds. All of a sudden out of the sky, those dark clouds parted, and there was this little ray of light that came. And God took opportunity with that and I lifted my mind away from my circumstances, and I looked back up towards the heavens and I said, there you are. Thank you God.

So He shows up over and over again. And as we grow in our capacity to understand the purpose behind our sufferings, every time we let go of a particular attachment, what we will experience is a deeper sense of freedom. But we'll also experience a deeper pure ache for God. That's an experience that sends a pain that will never go away. The problem is that we try and take that sense of emptiness and deficit, and we try and attach those things to the things of the world, thinking that's going to work, outside-in transformation. It doesn't work that way. That's a case study in futility.

In the midst of this I was drawn to Romans 8:16–25. *"The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. (there's our primary identity right there) And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (and here's the good news) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us, for to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility (we're talking about what happened in the fall, alright, we already talked about that) not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation (not just us but the whole creation) groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit (that's Christ) even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting eagerly for our adoptions as sons, the redemption of our body."*

What this is telling me is that the sufferings that I experience in this present day are reflective, maybe not of something wrong.

It kind of depends on the choices that I'm making. But maybe something more profoundly right that I could ever experience or understand. Maybe, just maybe, these labor pains, these deep sighs and groans of Romans 8 are consistent within each and every person in this room, are God's way of calling us as His children back into communion with Him time and time again. Maybe it's a blessed pain, maybe it's a holy deprivation as we look forward to what's coming in the future. So this points us back again to the hope that God is rewiring, recovering, restoring, re-reconciling us to His intended purposes. And despite our experience, despite what it looks like, despite the opened windows that we have and we look out and we see all the blemishes and the tarnish of the world, and we look in the mirror reflected back to our own hearts, and we see how broken we still are, God's redemptive purposes are still true today, right now, in this place where we're sitting. Can you hear that?

This takes us, once again, forward to the last two verses in that Romans 8 passage. *"For in hope we have been saved, but in hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see with perseverance, we wait eagerly for it."* So what we're talking about is the hope of heaven. God began a work, He hasn't completed it yet, but He's not going to drop us off at the curb now because things may look so tough in your life or the challenges are so hard to overcome. His promises are true.

So we fast forward to Revelation, the last book of the Bible, chapter 21:3-7: *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.' And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new' and He said, 'Write these words (not in tablets of stone..write these words on a tablet of your heart) for these words are faithful and true.' Then He said to me, 'It's done. I'm the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, I will to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son.'"*

And in Chapter 22:3-5: *"There will no longer be any curse in the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever."*

So this is your promise today. I don't know where you're at in regards to this whole curriculum. You could say it's God's curriculum in our lives as Christians. Our stories and God's story intersect everyday, through our silence, through our prayers, through our worship, through our fellowship with one another, and through them He reaches for us. As Ken Gire sums it up so well, our story and God's story meet at windows in our everyday experience. These are windows of the soul. But we must learn to look with more than just our eyes and listen with more than just our ears, for the sounds are sometimes faint and our sights sometimes fall away. We must be aware at all times and in all places because windows are everywhere. At anytime we may find one or one may find us, though we will hardly know it unless we are searching for Him who for so long has been searching for us. God is alive. Despite your experience, despite what it looks like to the contrary, He is alive, and He has not only the capacity to turn a life as mine in the drop of a second, but the resources and the faithfulness to work that out over a process of time.

So I hope you're encouraged today. I hope that you leave here with a greater, maybe broader, sense of how God works in our lives despite our frailty, despite our weaknesses and our brokenness, even despite our cruelty, and how out of the wasteland of our lives He can build something that's absolutely beautiful, and when you look in the mirror, you will see that reflected. He is doing a work in you to the degree that the end product is going to be a piece of gold that is so perfect that He Himself can see His image reflected through it. Do you know that about God? I hope you're encouraged, and I hope that if you're not at that place yet, maybe you're new with this whole thing, that you will take something away from here that has resonated within your heart. Because that's what God's truth does for us.

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