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The Cure for Spiritual Amnesia

Welcome to Week One! I hope you have that first-day-of-school feeling of excitement mixed with a touch of nervousness. I do. I've spent months praying for the women who would pick up this study. *You, friend, are a dream come true.*

Each week is divided into five daily studies. Take them a day at a time, or clump a few together. Find a pace that works well for you. Just don't try to cram them all in fifteen minutes before you're supposed to be at your women's Bible study, deal? I've been there and done that. If racing through a study is your goal, that approach might work. But my hope is that we might be *transformed* by the pages of God's Word. That requires diligence. *Whoever is doing the work is doing the learning.* The more we give this study our focused attention in the weeks ahead, God's Word will transform us.

WEEK ONE

Here are some tools that can help along the way:

- **A study Bible.** We'll be focusing on a portion of Scripture where timelines and cultural references might feel a little clunky. A good study Bible keeps helpful insights nearby.
- **A good pen.** Our Bibles aren't meant to be preserved for a future museum display. They are meant to be *used*! Writing in your Bible helps you engage with the text you are reading. Circle repeated phrases, write questions and prayers in the margins, underline the words of God. If you want to do it in style, use my favorite pens, Papermate Flairs. Swoon!
- **Other women.** Other women bring a richness to the study of God's Word that we can't find anywhere else. Ask a friend or two to go through this study with you or participate in a larger group through your church. I've included group discussion questions after each chapter to make it easy and you can find a more detailed group guide at erindavis.org.

This week, we'll see that we're all prone to forget the character of God. Instead of letting us wander in that dazed state, God has a plan to remind us who He is. May you find your heart tethered more closely to His this week.

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

HERMENWHATICS?

BIG IDEA: *We can handle God's Word "rightly."*

READ PSALM 119:9-16

If I were to place all of the weapons that exist in the Davis household into a single pile, you might be able to see it from space. I am the mother of four boys. And boys being boys, they are big fans of the instruments of war. We have NERF guns galore, foam bullets in spades, and pocket knives in every pocket, drawer, and hidey hole.

As each boy nears double digits, their daddy teaches them how to whittle. It's a supervised way to learn how to handle a sharp blade rightly. Every boy has needed a bandage or two along the way, but by God's grace, there are still forty little boy fingers in my house.

Why do I tell you all of that? In part, because I love to talk about my boys. (Wanna see a picture?) But more importantly, because as we open God's Word together, I want us to remember that it's a sword.

Consider Paul's words found in Ephesians 6:16-17, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

We're going to make a habit of reading Scripture slowly and intentionally in this study. It takes focus to click the pieces of the puzzle together. Let's start now.

Go back and reread Ephesians 6:16–17. How is the Word of God described?

The author of Hebrews gives us a similar description. Write out Hebrews 4:12 below.

Again, we see sword language here. A sword may be an antiquated weapon, but God's Word isn't getting dull displayed on a shelf. *The Bible is sharp and ready for battle.*

Why do you think the writer of this passage describes God's Word in this way?

Yes, the Bible is a comfort, reminding us we can hope in God's care.

True, it is a teacher, revealing the mysteries of who God is.

It certainly is a guide, teaching us how to live.

But make no mistake, it is also a weapon, cutting away at the parts of us that do not bear the image of God.

That's why we find this important warning embedded in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."

Circle the word that describes how we are to handle the Word of God.

Paul's warning to handle God's Word "rightly" reminds us that it's possible to handle it wrongly. As imperfect sinners with limited knowledge and understanding, it's possible to misunderstand or misapply the perfect Word of God.

HERMENEUTICS?

As I study the Bible, I've found the Rules of Hermeneutics to be so helpful. Hermeneutics is a fancy word for application. These are guidelines for how we rightly apply (or handle) God's Word.

Scholars have spent endless hours and reservoirs of ink writing about these rules. Since I'm not a scholar, and my words are limited, here's a crash course. Take a moment to write down any thoughts or questions you have about each rule.

Rule #1: We let Scripture interpret Scripture.

It is essential for us to interpret a passage in light of what the rest of Scripture says on the topic. A correct interpretation is always consistent with the rest of Scripture.

Thoughts:

Questions:

Rule #2: We pay close attention to context.

Every word in the Bible is part of a verse.

Every verse is part of a paragraph.

Every paragraph is part of a book.

Every book is part of the whole of Scripture.

No verse of Scripture should be divorced from the verses around it.

We will spend the next eight weeks hyperfocused on one chapter in one book in the Bible, but the goal is to connect what we find in Leviticus 23 with what we find in the rest of God's Word.

Thoughts:

Questions:

Rule #3: Pause to consider what type of book or passage you're reading.

Here are some broad categories that can be used to help us understand the context of most Scripture passages:

- 1) Epistles or Letters
- 2) Gospels
- 3) Parables
- 4) Eschatology
- 5) Apocalyptic
- 6) Law
- 7) Historical Narrative
- 8) Hebrew Poetry
- 9) Prophecy
- 10) Wisdom

Taking a moment to pause and consider what type of writing we're reading in Scripture helps us rightly apply God's Word in our lives.

Let's practice.

READ ECCLESIASTES 7:1-3

Write the reference next to the category it falls under in the list above.

READ LUKE 15:3-7

Write the reference next to the category it falls under in the list above.

Thoughts:

Questions:

Rule #4: Try to discern the writer's intentions when he wrote the text.

A passage cannot mean something to us today that it was never intended to mean to the original audience.

The Bible is unique in its timelessness. In this study, we will read words written centuries ago that still apply to us, and yet, they were not originally written just for us. We can grow in rightly handling the Word by training ourselves to consider the original hearers of each text.

Thoughts:

Questions:

Rule #5: Keep it simple.

The Bible is not a book of riddles to be solved. God is not a God of confusion, but of clarity (1 Cor. 14:33). He has not spoken in order to conceal, but to be understood and known (Isa. 48:6; Jer. 33:3).

When we open God's Word, it is the plain meaning of the text we are seeking to understand.

Let's practice.

READ MARK 4:1-9

We could go round and round on this passage if we chose to. We could debate hidden meanings and possible applications; instead, let's keep it simple.

What is Christ teaching us in this verse?

In this case, we have the gift of Christ's explanation of the parable.

READ MARK 4:10-20

How does your understanding of the parable match up to Christ's? Is your explanation more simple or more complex than His?

There are certainly parts of Scripture that are complex and impossible to reduce to a simplistic command. Thank goodness we have the Holy Spirit to help us as we read! But generally, it is wise to approach the Bible looking for the simplest explanation of what is being revealed.

Thoughts:

Questions:

Rule #6: Always take a God-centered approach.

Avoid looking at Scripture primarily to better understand yourself or correct your actions. Ask yourself, "What does this show me about God?" before you ask, "What does this tell me about me?" or "What should I do?" *Right application of Scripture is only ever an outflow of right understanding of who God is.*

In order of importance, this is rule #1, but I've placed it here, so we can linger on this thought for a moment.

As women, we are hardwired to want to be pleasing. It is one of the ways we bear the image of God.

We want to be good daughters, good wives, good mothers, good friends, good employees, and good Christ followers. Often we open our Bible with that goal, however subconsciously, in mind. We're looking for ways to make adjustments in order to be better women. God is gracious to transform us through His Word. He will reshape you as you read, but the Bible is not primarily a self-help guide. Here is a truth I must remind myself of often:

The Bible is not a book about you. The Bible is a book about Jesus.

This shift is important. We will not open the Bible together in these weeks searching for a clearer view of ourselves. We will open the Bible searching for a clearer, bigger, more awe-inspiring view of God. As we do, we will be changed. *We are better able to bear the image of God when we better understand the character of God.*

Consider your own personal approach to Scripture. Is there evidence that you tend to take a God-centered approach, opening your Bible primarily to see God? Or a me-centered approach, opening your Bible to primarily see yourself? How can you tell?

Is there evidence of a hybrid approach, sometimes searching for God and sometimes searching for self in the pages of your Bible? How can you tell?

Like my little boys learning to whittle, we just practiced handling the Word of God in a way that guards, protects, and reshapes our hearts. We will stay within these guardrails as we consider the Seven Feasts. I'm asking the Lord to remind you of them well beyond the weeks of this study.

This is my prayer for you:

Jesus, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Grow our hunger for it and teach us to open it looking for You. Lord, train every woman who works through this study to be a spiritual samurai, rightly wielding the Word of Truth in their lives and in the culture around them. Amen.

What are you asking the Lord to do in your life through this study? Write out your prayer below.

WEEK 1 | DAY 2

RULES FOR WANDERING

BIG IDEA: *God's Law works like guardrails to protect us as we wander.*

READ EXODUS 24

I've put all of my babies to sleep with my favorite hymn, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." It's a prayer I sing over their lives. I sing some of its words over your life too.

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it
mount of God's redeeming love.*

This verse always puts a lump in my throat.

*Oh, to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee:*

*prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.*¹

I've chosen this hymn over other lullabies because my boys have my DNA. They also share the DNA of their foreparents, Adam and Eve. Which means, like me (like all of us) they are sinners, prone to wander from the God they love.

Church history holds a precious story of Robert Robinson, the author of this eighteenth-century hymn. Though the story is unconfirmed, I've often heard the tale of Robert riding in a stagecoach years after he came to Christ. A woman in the coach asked him his thoughts on the hymn she was humming. Robert reportedly replied, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."²

I can't presume to know what Robert was feeling in that moment. But I know what I've felt in the more than twenty years I've been walking with Christ. There have been times when I've felt:

- squashed by my own sin
- defeated by my inability to be holy as God is holy
- frustrated at how slow the sanctification process is
- tempted to question the goodness of God in the midst of difficult circumstances
- wandering from the wonder of loving God and knowing His Word . . .

We're all prone to wander, aren't we? Our sinful hearts are prone to wander from God's law. We are prone to forget His precious promises. We tend to prioritize our way over God's way.

Take a moment to pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you are prone to wander. Write down anything that comes to mind.

If you've ever felt, like Robert may have, like you are the only child of God with a wandering heart, *you'll love the book of Leviticus. It is a book for wanderers.*

Before we get there, we need to backtrack to the book of Exodus. (Remember, every piece of the puzzle connects to the other pieces). Let's quickly see how the people of Israel found themselves wandering.

Look up the Exodus passages below. Write down the events recorded in each passage. I've filled in a few for you.

Exodus 1:8-14

- New king in Egypt
- Threatened by the Israelites
- Set taskmasters over the Israelites
- God's people built cities for Pharaoh
- God's people multiplied
- Israelites enslaved

Exodus 2:23-25

Exodus 3:7-12

Exodus 12:29–32

- The LORD strikes down all the firstborn in Egypt
- A great cry in Egypt
- Pharaoh summons Moses, lets the Israelites go

Exodus 12:50–51

According to Exodus 12:40–41, how many years of history did we just cover?

We'll circle back to some of the details we missed in the weeks ahead, but for now, let's focus on the major milestones.

What problems were God's people facing?

How did God intervene? What did He promise them?

Wouldn't it be great if this is how this story ended? The people of God experienced miraculous deliverance, then peacefully walked into the Promised Land. Hooray. Pass the popcorn.

But we're all prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love. The Israelites wandered from one form of captivity to another. They simply swapped taskmasters from Pharaoh to unbelief, rebellion, and discontentment.

According to Exodus 16:35, it took _____ for the Israelites to get to the Promised Land of Canaan.

That's a lot of wandering. Which brings us to the book of Leviticus. Consider writing the words "Rules for wandering" next to the Leviticus heading in your Bible. Though a complicated book, at its core it is a guide to help God's people wander in the wilderness. It lists the rules to keep the nation of Israel tethered to Him because of their tendency to stray.

READ LEVITICUS 27:34

Who, specifically, did God reveal the Levitical laws to? Where were they handed down? Who are they for?

If the headline of Exodus 24 is about the Mosaic covenant, Leviticus is the fine print. Yes, it is a book of laws and rituals, but let's think of them instead like guardrails given by a loving Father. Despite their chronic rebellion, the book of Leviticus is proof that God cares for His people and provides boundaries for our protection. My friend Rabbi Lane Steinger³ (you'll hear more from him throughout this study) says that he prefers not to call the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament, including Leviticus) the law, but "teaching" or "instruction." Instead of calling the specific rules listed in Leviticus "commands" or "laws," he focuses on the Hebrew meaning of the word as it relates to providing direction. For example, "*Torah*, the common Hebrew word for law, comes from a Hebrew word meaning to *point out* or *direct*."⁴ Like a loving parent who communicates and enforces rules for their child's protection, Leviticus outlines the "rules" or "instructions" needed for God's people to thrive.

Next to each of the following passages, write down why God asks His people to obey His law.

Joshua 1:8

1 Kings 2:2–4

Ezekiel 20:19–20

God's law is for our good. Leviticus isn't just a book of rules arbitrarily handed down by a detached authority. They are opportunities to learn how to live, given to us by our patient Teacher. This paradigm shift matters, because it speaks to the heart of God.

To wrap up today's study, write out the final verse below of "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" (shared earlier) as your own prayer today.

WEEK 1 | DAY 3

THE CURE FOR SPIRITUAL AMNESIA

BIG IDEA: *God's Word cures our spiritual amnesia.*

READ LEVITICUS 23:1-2

Imagine waking up tomorrow with a mind full of blank memories. You can't recall who your parents are, where you live, or where you are employed. It happened to Jody Roberts.

In 1985, a 26-year-old crime reporter at the Tacoma News Tribune named Jody Roberts disappeared. Though she left no trace, her family suspected foul play. Five days after Jody vanished, a young woman wearing a University of Denver sweatshirt walked out of a suburban Denver shopping mall and panicked because she could not remember who she was. Doctors tried to help her, but could not restore her memory. With no memories of her past to orient her, she requested a new social security number, adopted the name Jane Dee, enrolled in college, and tried to move on.

Twelve years later authorities discovered Jody living as Jane in Alaska, now as a married mother of four. She had no memory of her life in the lower 48, but she agreed to reunite with the parents she forgot.⁵

She still goes by Jane Dee. The memories of her previous life have never returned.

Amnesia like Jane’s impacts less than three percent of the population,⁶ but there is another form of amnesia that affects us all. I call it “spiritual amnesia.” The nation of Israel, described in Exodus, makes the perfect case study for this condition.

Scripture records many moments when the people of God—not unlike Jody panicking at a Colorado shopping mall—frantically forgot all God had done for them.

Fill in the chart below to record Israel’s history of spiritual amnesia.

| WHAT WAS THEIR COMPLAINT? | WHAT DID THEY FORGET? |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <u>Exodus 14:10-12</u> | <u>Exodus 12:30-32</u> |
| <u>Exodus 16:1-3</u> | <u>Exodus 1:13-14</u> |
| <u>Exodus 17:1-2</u> | <u>Exodus 15:22-25</u> |
| <u>Numbers 11:1-6</u> | <u>Exodus 3:7-12</u> |
| <u>Numbers 14:1-4</u> | <u>Exodus 6:2-8</u> |

Do you ever read these accounts of the people of Israel and find yourself shaking your head in frustration?

- These are the children God promised to Abraham. (Gen. 22:17)
- These are the people who saw the tablets of stone on which God carved the Ten Commandments with His own finger. (Ex. 31:18)
- These are the ones who cried out for a deliverer and enjoyed the supernatural protection of God as Moses ushered in twelve terrible plagues. (Ex. 7–12)

Their feet walked across the Red Sea on dry ground, their bellies had been filled with manna that rained down from heaven, and their parched lips had been quenched by water God supernaturally squeezed from a stone (Ex. 17:1–7).

Surely, these memories were seared into their hearts. Surely, these stories were told and retold around every campfire. Surely, surely their faith was unshakeable. Instead, we find them to be a forgetful bunch, chronically drawing a blank about the faithfulness of God.

If we read these verses and think we are different in this way, we've lost track of why these stories are in the Bible in the first place.

READ ROMANS 15:4 BELOW.

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Now write that same verse here to cement it in your own heart and mind:

Let's park here a while, letting our hearts marinate in this important revelation about why the ancient stories are worth paying attention to.

“For whatever was written in former days . . .”

To better grasp this phrase, let’s zoom out and consider the bigger puzzle.

Flip back a few pages to Romans 1:1, followed by verse 7. Who wrote the book of Romans? Who did he write this book to?

Right out of the gate we know that Paul is writing this letter to non-Jews, followers of Jesus living in Rome.

Let’s widen the lens a little more.

READ GALATIANS 1:15-16

According to this passage, who was Paul called to preach to? (Be specific.)

Though Paul was a devout Jew before his conversion, after meeting Christ, he dedicated his life to preaching the gospel to non-Jews (a.k.a. Gentiles).

Surely the Gentiles in Paul’s day were asking, “Why does Scripture matter to us?” The Old Testament was, after all, written by Israelites, for Israelites.

Much of the book of Romans is dedicated to addressing the role of the law (Old Testament) in the life of the New Testament Gentile believer (that’s us!). It can serve as our guide as we ask the same question as believers in Paul’s day: *Why do the stories of the nation of Israel from thousands of years ago matter to us today?*

Let’s head back to Romans 15:4: “For whatever was written in former days *was written for our instruction . . .*”

According to that verse, why was the desert wandering of God's people recorded?

What is Scripture teaching us about? (Hint: What is the purpose of Scripture?)

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, *that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures . . .*”

The Bible is an enduring book. What does 1 Peter 1:25 tell us about how long God's Word will last? Write the verse here.

The Bible is also an encouraging book. Let's finish Romans 15:4 to see why.

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures *we might have hope.*”

In revealing who God is, the Bible shows us the only source of true hope. The stories of the wandering, forgetful Israelites aren't ultimately about *them*. They're about *Him*. When we humble ourselves and see how much our sinful hearts are prone to spiritual amnesia, we see how much hope is truly found in the faithfulness of God.

Write out Psalm 103:2 below.

Yes, David, the greatest human king of the nation of Israel . . . David, the giant slayer . . . David, the “man after God’s own heart” had spiritual amnesia too. So he gave himself this advice, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

In other words, praise and remember. Praise and remember. Praise and remember.

Let’s head back to Leviticus 23:1–2. The feasts are not just days on the calendar, they are an invitation to a forgetful people, given by a faithful God, *to praise and remember*. Praise and remember.

We all have spiritual amnesia, but there is a cure. “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Ps. 103:2).

Below make a list of the worries and fears that weigh you down today. Here is a peek at my list:

- I worry about the health of my aging parents.
- I have fears about the cultural darkness that seems to be growing.
- I worry that I won’t get everything that is needed done today and I will disappoint God and others.

Write your burdens in the chart that follows. Next to each worry or fear on your list, list a quality or characteristic of God, or a time when He has come through for you, to remind you of His faithfulness.

Here are some qualities of God that give me specific comfort:

- God is attentive to our needs.
- God is sovereign over all things.
- God’s love for me is everlasting.

Your turn.

| MY BURDENS | GOD'S FAITHFULNESS |
|------------|--------------------|
| | |
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WEEK 1 | DAY 4

DIVINE RHYTHMS

BIG IDEA: *God has established rhythms to help us turn toward Him.*

READ GENESIS 1

I like to have a plan. I like to know the plan. I like to write the plan in pretty colors in my day planner.

How about you? When it comes to your calendar, how would you rate yourself on the scale below?

Wanna see my spreadsheet? I make plans in pencil Plan? What plan?
.....
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Whether you are a planner to a T or a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kinda girl, your life has rhythms. Daily rhythms feed into monthly rhythms, which flow into yearly rhythms, which ultimately become the cadence of our lives.

Open your Bible to Genesis 1. We're going to walk through the creation of the world, looking for rhythms.

First things first: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (v. 1).

READ GENESIS 1:2

Describe what's happening in this verse.

Don't worry if you struggle to come up with something to write. Not much was happening. The Spirit of God was hovering, but the earth was without form and void. Void of what? Among other things, it was void of *rhythms*.

The sun wasn't rising in the east each morning and setting in the west each evening. The tide wasn't coming in and going out. People weren't sipping their morning cup of coffee or tucking their children into bed.

What other creation rhythms can you think of? Make a list below.

As we keep reading, we hear a drumbeat start. The rhythms of life are about to begin.

Day 1

READ VV. 3-5

What did God say?

What did God make?

How did creation respond?

Day 2

READ VV. 6-8

What did God say?

What did God make?

How did creation respond?

Day 3

READ VV. 9-13

What did God say?

What did God make?

How did creation respond?

Day 4

READ VV. 14-19

What did God say?

What did God make?

How did creation respond?

Day 5

READ VV. 20-23

What did God say?

What did God make?

How did creation respond?

Day 6

READ VV. 24-31

What did God say?

What did God make?

How did creation respond?

Life on planet earth has always had a pattern. God speaks. Creation responds. The sun sets. The sun rises. Repeat.

Take a moment to consider your own rhythms. What does a typical day look like? A typical month? A typical year?

At the dawn of creation God gave us life. He gave us light, and food, and zebras, and strawberries . . . He also gave us *the calendar*, a blueprint for the daily rhythms of our lives.

Perhaps you've never stopped to consider why we have a seven-day week, and not a two-day week or a two-hundred day week. (Though some weeks feel that long). Right here, on the first pages of our Bibles we see God establishing this rhythm.

How many days did He create? How many days did He rest?

Other calendar patterns can be found in the world He created.

Years are marked by the passage of seasons. Days lengthen and then shorten, and then lengthen again.

Months are marked by the cycles of the moon. Astronomers recognize four primary moon phases: new moon, first quarter moon, full moon, and last quarter moon. Don't worry, there won't be a quiz, but I'm about to give us the one and only math equation in this study. Calculators encouraged!

Creation follows the pattern God established here in Genesis.

How many days are in the average month? _____

Divide the number of days in the average month by the four phases of the moon. What's the nearest whole number? _____

Seven!

A seven-day week is built into the framework of existence. It's always been a part of God's plan.

The drumbeat established at creation continues through the Jewish calendar outlined in Leviticus 23. The Seven Feasts mirror the seven days of creation. Again, God speaks and creation responds.

One of the greatest gifts the Seven Feasts can give us is attention to the rhythms of our lives. God was writing in the planners of His people to help them remember who He is. He was establishing rhythms of work, rest, and worship to keep them tethered to Him, even as they wandered.

As New Testament Christians, we're not bound to a strict observance of the Seven Feasts, but if we let them, the feasts will reshape our rhythms to shift our focus toward Him. The feasts can help us pay attention to, and participate in the other rhythms God has established for His people.

Let me show you. Look up Luke 22:14-23. What rhythm was Christ establishing?

What was He helping us remember?

From creation, to Leviticus, to the Gospels (and beyond) God has always established rhythms to help us seek Him. He set the calendar in the sky. He modeled a pattern of work and rest for us to follow. He gave us rituals to help us remember who He is.

As you close this day's study, consider your lists of daily, monthly, and annual rhythms.

- Do you see patterns that point you to Jesus often?
- Is He the focus of your days, your weeks, your years?
- Do your rhythms need adjustment to remind you of who He is more?