

00-10-08a

Let's begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for the opportunity to gather, to fellowship, through the study of Your Word, through the ministry of the spiritual gifts that You have assigned to each one of us. We thank You that whether we are alone or in the company of fellow believers, we are strengthened and sustained by Your grace, Your divine power, in the person of Your Spirit, in the presence of Your Word, in our souls.

We pray this morning that as we seek to gain a better understanding of the truth of Your Word, that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, that we can rightly divide the Word of Truth, that we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds and grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this is something of a monumental morning because we are going to finish our lengthy, but I hope fruitful, study of the book of Genesis this morning. And I'd like to turn for our Scripture reading to the Psalms. To celebrate the occasion, we're going to read two psalms.

Sometimes the psalms are long and we read half a psalm. We're going to make up for it by reading two psalms this morning. And if you'll go to Psalm 139, our Scripture reading will come from Psalm 139 followed by 138.

Oddly enough, we're going to be doing a little bit of looking back this morning in Genesis and we're also going to look back in the Psalms. But these two psalms, I think, capture much of the essence of what we have learned in the course of our study of the first book of the Bible. And I'd like to enjoy this nice summary of some of those themes that we find here in the hymnal of Israel.

Psalm 139 is subtitled in the New King James, God's Perfect Knowledge of Man. David praises God for His all-seeing providence. There's one thing that we have observed throughout the 50 chapters of Genesis.

It is this principle, isn't it? God knows us. He knows us from our inception. He knew what we would be like as a race and as individuals before the universe ever came into being.

And yet, even though He knows all, He knows the depths of our depravity. He knows our shortcomings and our failures. He knows just how sinful our nature really is.

And yet, we praise Him for His all-seeing providence. God provides for us in spite of ourselves because His love is based on who and what He is, not who and what we are. And that is the nature of divine love.

Its quality is determined by the one expressing the love, not the object of the love. And

that's a very difficult thing for us as human beings. We tend to appreciate and to prioritize things based on the merit that we see in them.

So this is a great psalm for us to begin our study with this morning. O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up.

You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.

You have hedged me behind and before and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high.

I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall fall on me, even the night shall be light about me. Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You.

But the night shines as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts.

You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.

My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written.

The days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand. When I am awake, I am still with You.

Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, You bloodthirsty men! For they speak against You wickedly. Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred.

I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxieties.

And see if there is any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting." You could almost just stop and go forth and meditate on that psalm the rest of the day. It's a great

expression of perspective, especially for an Old Testament believer to understand the grace and the provision of God.

It's a scary thing to realize that God has searched us and knows us. We can present an appearance to one another. We can try to do... There's a similarity in the way that we dress.

We try to dress in a way that flatters us. If someone is large on the top and small on the bottom, well, then they wear light colors on the bottom and dark colors on the top and vice versa to try to change the perception of reality. If you're a wide person, you try not to wear horizontal stripes.

So I've heard. If you're a tall, skinny person, you try not to wear vertical stripes because it accentuates your least desirable features in terms of appearance. We use cosmetics.

We try to dress ourselves up. You get a great big red lump on your face somewhere. Even guys will go digging in their wives' cosmetics to try to find some flesh-colored pasty stuff to put on there and try to make it not so neon in its appearance.

We try to accentuate the positive and minimize the negatives in our appearance before one another and more so in our personality and in our character where we may be boiling and seething inside and we try to look like we're calm and relaxed and easygoing on the outside. We do a fan dance with one another often all through the day. But there is no fan dance.

There are no cosmetics for the soul. God sees it all. He knows every thought.

He knows every motive. He knows our priorities. He knows our sitting down and our rising up, the things that motivate us, the things that cause us to sit down and quit, the things that get us up and motivate us through our day.

God knows all of those things. And that is really the measure of where we stand in our spiritual progress. What is the nature of that thought life? Because we are what we think.

We are not what we appear. We are not what we do. We are not what we say.

We are what we think. To the extent that what we do and what we say reflects our thinking and to the extent that that thinking is sound, that is the measure of our progress in faith and in obedience. And those two things as the way out are what the book of Genesis is fundamentally all about.

We are going to look at that more closely in our upcoming two lessons, final two lessons in Genesis. But it is a little bit unnerving if you really realize that God knows and sees everything. It has been said, and I think it is a valid thing to observe, that if you want to know what you are really like, if you want to know what your genuine inner being

consists of, look at what you are like when you are alone.

Because much of what we do is conditioned by the observation of people. And we tend to relax and let down our guard when we are all by ourselves. There are sins that we only commit when we are alone.

There are activities that we engage in. There are people, not in this assembly certainly, but one of the greatest problems plaguing Christianity, Christian homes and Christian leadership is what is available on the Internet. And you don't hook up the computer to the TVs in the church sanctuary or in public or when the family is around and go out and view pornography.

People do this in privacy. One of the allures, and the reason it is so difficult to resist, is that there is nobody there but you on the computer screen. And a lot of people succumb to that and indulge the lusts of the flesh.

And not just pornography. There is also shopping. There are chat groups.

There are surrogate social life that people can have. They enjoy the anonymity. They enjoy the ability to be someone else, to put themselves over in these environments, chat rooms where there may be several people.

You can put yourself in there as someone else. You can masquerade. You can live a fantasy life.

There are a lot of different ways that we live these fantasy lives, but God sees what we really are. And we begin to see what we really are when we are alone, when there are no external pressures or influences, when we are all by ourselves. What do we do? How do we spend our time? What do we let our mind dwell on? What activities do we engage in? You see many of the great characters of the Bible in isolation situations, Moses in the wilderness, David in the wilderness, Elijah by the brook Cherith, Joseph in prison, where the character is tested and is brought out without all of the controlling and mitigating, moderating influences.

This is often true as well when someone comes under the influence of something such as alcohol where our superficial abilities to put on our facade and hide behind our mask are lifted. And the military service is a great place to get acquainted with how people act when they are drunk because there is not so much as there used to be when it was really a part of the military culture. They have really tried to change that.

But the military used to sponsor and encourage happy hour on Friday. When I first went into service, military clubs still had partially clad dancers and things in the clubs. And of course all of this tended to bring people to the clubs and sell the alcohol in the club system which got some of that paycheck money back to put into the government coffers and so on.

But I would say one of the good things and I think that is kind of a short list, but one of the good things about the really promoting of women into the military is that they had to stop doing that. And that was a good thing. That was kind of a corrupting influence.

But you find out what people are like, what is really stewing around in their soul when those superficial inhibitions are raised. And alcohol will do this. A lot of people turn into mean drunks.

Other people are just happy, lampshade dwelling, dance on the table type of people when they are drunk. And you find out that they are essentially a pretty happy person. But the point here is God has a perfect knowledge of us both individually and collectively.

And the amazing thing is that even though He knows everything about us, He still loves us. He still expresses His grace toward us. He desires to save us, not only from the lake of fire, but out of this present evil age, out of the corruption of our nature.

His goal is to return us to His own image, to reflect His own glory. And it is one of these stunning truths that should never fail to encourage us and should never fail to motivate us that the God of the universe cares about us even though, left to ourselves, we are hopeless, helpless, and useless. That is one of the major themes of the book that we have been studying for so long.

He is acquainted with all of our ways. There's not a word on our tongue, but He knows it all together. He has hedged us in behind and before and laid His hand upon us.

He comprehends our path and our lying down. No matter where we go or what happens, night is just like day. I saw the voyeuristic, quote-unquote, reality show trend that has been coming up on television in the last few years with the show where the people were on the island.

And Big Brother is one of them and Survivor is one of them. Well, these are borrowings from across the pond. They started in Europe.

I saw a program last night showing what we can expect because this is what's currently going on in Europe. They've taken these a step further and they are going to... I think even an American show is going to do this. They're going to chain four guys to a girl for a week or two weeks or something like this and then she's going to eliminate one per day or one at certain intervals until there's only one left.

There's a show that they show over in the Netherlands where they put three guys and a girl in a completely dark room and they have to fumble around and find one another and she eliminates one after another. It's just playing to the depravity of the sinful nature. And it's more interesting for people to watch, supposedly, because this all takes place in the complete darkness.

Nobody can see except the cameras which have these infrared lenses or whatever. So the audience can see everything. But obviously this gives people a chance to grope one another and do all kinds of unsavory things.

And you realize that this is a part of what has happened to the human race. This is how far we have gotten from the image of God. And people love the darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

And a lot of this peeping-Tom, voyeuristic, quote-unquote, reality show trend that is so popular, there are people who actually rearrange their travel schedules and everything to see episodes of these shows. I've seen it in Christian organization. I've seen people say, I've got to be home tonight to see thus and so or the making of the band or a lot of these other things where they say, well, we're going to collect these random people, we're going to put them together and make them into a super rock group and do this, that and the other.

People get hooked on this because it's voyeuristic. It gives you the ability to see something you wouldn't ordinarily see. And that to me is making our bed in Sheol.

But God can lead us and guide us no matter where we are because to Him the darkness doesn't hide anything. The night shines as the day. Verse 12, the darkness and the light are both alike to you.

There is nothing that is hidden from God. And even with His knowledge, it amazes me that He doesn't just do what He told Moses He was going to do to the Israelites and just blow us away and start all over. Do like He did at the flood and wipe everything out and start fresh because it is so depressing.

And yet when we look at what happens around us in culture and in the human race, we realize that this is nothing more than a manifestation of the same corruption that all of us are born into, that all of us partake of and that we are in fact responsible for. It used to be kind of trendy in some circles to blame our failures and our sins on our sin nature. Oh, well, I've got this little sin nature inside.

It was kind of a takeoff on the devil made me do it. And we'd say, oh, you know, that was the area of weakness of my sin nature, the area of strength of my sin nature. The sin nature is not a separate little object in our soul.

The sin nature is our soul. We are the sin nature. It is our nature to be sinful and we need rehabilitation.

This is another one of the great themes of Genesis that is illustrated throughout the book. You formed my inward parts, the psalmist says in verse 13. You covered me in my mother's womb.

I will praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. And the sad thing is that even though we were so fearfully and wonderfully made, it is so easy for us to forget why we were made and what our purpose is. And we, you know, all we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. God saw us when our substance was unformed. But notice verse 16.

In your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them. Calvinists like to seize on this and say that everything has been foreordained. But what this means is that God mapped out the path of our life.

He knew the family we would be born into, the people that we would encounter, the array of strengths and weaknesses of character that would define us as individuals. He knew every day, every circumstance, and mapped it out as an opportunity for salvation, for deliverance, for His grace and His mercy and His transforming power to be manifested in the small daily details of life. We tend to think that only the charge of the elephant gets recorded.

But the same knowledge of God that permeates this psalm is the knowledge that monitors our progress and measures our willingness to be faithful and to be obedient and to be transformed by the renewing of God's Word. The psalmist says in verse 17, How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand. When I am awake, I am still with You.

What do we do with our waking time? How much time, if any, do we devote to meditating on the precious thoughts of God? The great sum of them. It's not like you can run out and say, well, there's really nothing new to meditate on. They're like the grains of sand.

And the consequence of dwelling on the things of God, the power of God entering our lives through His Word and the ministry of His Spirit that makes it understandable to us is that we begin to think like God. And what's the result of that? We're going to be able to identify and eschew that good old King James word, E-S-C-H-E-W. We're going to be repelled by evil.

And that's what the psalmist mentions in verse 19. Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me therefore, you bloodthirsty men! What is His revulsion? It isn't, oh, the humanity, oh, the cruelty. Look at what you've done to the people in Palestine getting all outraged over in Israel.

The Palestinians, I should say, are outraged because they saw on television the shooting of a 12-year-old boy behind his father in this conflict. Well, Yasser Arafat has stirred that

up. The Palestinian Liberation Organization has declared a day of rage because they're not getting what they want in terms of territory concessions and other things from the nation of Israel.

So they declare a day of rage and tell all their people to go throw rocks and to attack the police and so forth. And then as a result of the conflict, a Palestinian father has his 12-year-old son shot in his arms. It gets caught on a television camera and everyone is incensed and outraged and goes to pieces over it.

But what is the issue? There are these bloodthirsty individuals who want to use violence to attain their goals. They see this action take place and they seize on it and they become sort of righteously indignant over it. The psalmist says, Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? Do I not loathe those who rise up against You? What is the motivation for our hate? Is it an image on TV? We're constantly being manipulated.

The elections are trying to manipulate us. The election process, the political parties and the political action committees and so forth pay for ads to try to motivate us with a sound bite or motivate us with a visual image. And they got in trouble because the bureaucrat's words swelled up behind and ended up just saying rats.

This is supposed to be subliminal influence and so on. What the psalmist is saying here is, what is his hatred for the wicked motivated by? I hate them, O Lord, who hate You. It is their relationship to God.

It is their spitting in the face of God, their rebelliousness against God and the things of God that motivates his hatred. Why does he say, Kill them, O Lord. Slay the wicked.

It isn't that he feels a sense of personal injustice. O Lord, they have robbed me and persecuted me, so slay them. He says, I hate those who hate you and I loathe those who rise up against you.

Righteous indignation is not righteous because a wrong has been committed against us. Righteous indignation is righteous because a wrong has been committed against God. But in order to think that way and have that kind of motivation, we have to treasure the thoughts of God.

We have to think like God thinks. And we find our indignation and our wrath generated not by personal slights, personal insults and personal attacks, but by the things that are against God. I hate them with perfect hatred.

I count them my enemies. Why? Because they are the enemies of God. And hard on the heels of that, in verse 23, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my anxieties and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. We do not have the ability to see ourselves the way God does.

When we go before the Lord and we want to be cleansed and forgiven of known and unknown sin, we acknowledge the things that we are aware of.

We homologeo. We confess our sins to God. But only God knows the depth and the extent of what is going on in our soul.

And our prayer should match this by the psalmist. Search me, O God, and know my heart. He's already said that God does know and see everything.

But he invites God. What is the thrust of these last two verses? We already know that God knows and sees everything. Every thought and intent of the heart.

The secret inward parts of us. But when we ask God to search us and know us, to try us, and to dig into our anxieties, our concerns, the things that motivate and impel us through our day, what are we saying? Expose those to my consciousness. Bring those to my mind so that Your Word and Your Spirit can go to work.

To purge so that we can be clean. To wash us so that we can be whiter than snow. This is a cry for deliverance out of this present evil age.

Out of our own corrupt natural state. I said we would look at two psalms. I want to now look at Psalm 138.

Because this is a praise to the Lord for His goodness to the faithful. I will praise You with my whole heart, David says. These are both, by the way, psalms of David.

I will praise You with my whole heart. Before the gods I will sing praises to You. What does it mean before the gods? Well, these are the Elohim in the old classic sense of the term.

These are the B'nei Ha'Elohim. These are the angelic hosts. The pre-created beings that were here before man.

The stars who sang together when God created the universe. And it's a reminder to us that our lives are lived out on a larger stage. It is not just the secret thoughts of our heart that only we know about and so on.

We are under observation. We know that the angelic hosts observe our lives. I suspect that in the same way that you can look at a table with flat circles and squares on it and see what's inside the circle and what's inside the square because we're in three dimensions where those flat paper cutouts are only in two.

Angelic creation as well as God can look and see the inmost beings, our inmost thoughts and motivations where when we look at one another, we can't. If you can imagine living in a flat world and having only two dimensions, you might come up to a circle or you might come up to a triangle, but you wouldn't necessarily know the shape because

looking at it on edge, it's going to look like a line in two dimensions. As it turns, it may be wider or narrower.

You may see a corner here and there, but it would be very difficult to distinguish the difference between a square and a diamond shape or an octahedron or whatever else. Looking at it on edge, everything looks real similar. We look very similar to one another.

We all kind of blend in with standard ideas of what's normal behavior and so forth, but if you rise above that and look down, you can see the difference between the circles and the squares and you can see right into the center of things. And I think, as the Bible says, all things are naked and exposed to Him with whom we have to do. I think the angelic creation, living in the realms of God, also sees these things.

And God is making very detailed teaching points about His own character and about the angelic conflict, about the nature of dependence upon God, subordination to God, faith and obedience with reference to God for the angelic creation in and through human lives and human civilization. So, David points this out. Before the gods, before the Elohim, these are the sons of God, these are the higher order creation, at least their higher order at present.

Before them, I will sing praises to you. I will worship toward your holy temple and praise your name for your lovingkindness and your truth, for you have magnified your word above all your name. In the day when I cried out, you answered me and made me bold with strength in my soul.

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me. You will stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand will save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerns me.

Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the works of your hands." And this again is something that we have seen throughout the book of Genesis that God cares for the righteous. He cares for all mankind and is going to redeem mankind.

He makes the promise back in Genesis 3. We see the depravity of man evidenced over and over, especially in the first 11 chapters. And then with the arrival of Abraham, we begin to see the redemptive plan of God unfold. And even though the patriarchs walk in the midst of trouble, God revives them.

He stretches out His hand against the wrath of their enemies. We think of Abraham and the kings, the coalition of kings that come down. We think of Jacob and the various trials and tribulations that he faced.

But the right hand of God delivers. God perfects that which concerns His people. His mercy endures forever, and He does not forsake the work of His hands.

So I find these two Psalms are very inspirational in the good sense of the word. It's a reminder that God has a detailed, intimate interest and knowledge of each one of us. And it is no less intimate, it is no less detailed, it is no less intense than His involvement with the progress of the human race in its entirety.

He is no less interested in you and in me as individuals than He is in Abraham or Moses or any of the figures of the Bible or the outcome of the entire civilization of mankind at large. God doesn't vary in His intensity of compassion. It is as large as the human race.

It is just as intense at the individual level. And we sometimes forget that. We think that we're swallowed in the vast sea of humanity.

What difference does it make? I'm just one of hundreds of thousands, millions of people down through history and hundreds of thousands of believers on the planet at any given time. Does one person more or less really make a difference? With this great sweep, this great grand plan of salvation and so on, all of the angels, all of the human race, do my little petty trials and victories really matter in the overall scheme of things? But that's looking at things at a human level, from a human point of view. From God's perspective, it is as though for our purposes there was no one else but you or no one else but me.

That everything in God's plan hinges on what happens in your soul and my soul day by day by day. God is infinite. He doesn't have to prioritize.

He doesn't have to assign great importance to some things and lesser importance to others in terms of His attention or His love or the intensity of His grace and His compassion. It is as though everything revolves around you or everything revolves around me. In that sense, we should be treating our daily life as though everything in the plan of God, everything that God wants to demonstrate to the angels, everything that God wants to accomplish in the human race hinges on what happens in your soul and my soul today, right now.

That this is the focus because that's the way the Word of God presents it to us. The battle is in the soul. The focus, we are at the center of the stadium.

All of the cameras and all of the lights are pointed at us. And you can't slough off the responsibility. You can't dodge the issue and say, well, I'm just one.

Let somebody else carry the torch. Let somebody else win the race and fight the battle. There's nothing special.

There's nothing unique. There's nothing... If there was nothing special and unique, you and I would not be here. We are here because there are special, there are unique points

that God is making.

Would you want to subtract David out of the Old Testament? Would you want to take out Elijah or Moses or Joseph or Abraham? The Old Testament in particular would be incomplete without some of those great heroes of the faith. Do you really want to subtract out Simon Peter from the New Testament? Or Paul? We think, oh, but they were great heroes of the faith. We are all potentially great heroes of the faith.

And just because we haven't seen the Third Testament of God's Bible doesn't mean that we are not in it. We are. And when you deal with an infinite God and an infinite amount of time and an infinite future in which to learn about Him, my belief is that we are in that great, grand Bible that reveals God's plan and purpose, His character, the nature of His love for creation.

And we are day by day writing the story. What do you think Abraham would have lived like? What do you think Jacob, Moses, and the other Old Testament saints would have lived like if they could see the chapters being written day by day? If they could see the words of Scripture being penned as they made their choices and lived their lives? That's the way we need to view our life. Look at the detailed knowledge of God.

Why does He know us from the time we're knitted together in our mother's womb? Why does He know our sitting down and our rising up? What is the purpose of that knowledge? God is not inefficient. It's not just useless information. He's not the Internet, which is the repository of all of the useless information in the world, as well as a little tiny fraction of useful information.

God is efficient. If He knows these things, it's for a purpose, it's for a reason. He weaves it into His plan.

And we need to look at our lives and our thoughts and our words, our actions in that light. We are a Bible story being written at this very moment. That's what's on the line.

To live our lives in that way is to give God priority. It is to live with Psalm 138 and Psalm 139 in view. That is what the book of Genesis is designed to motivate in us.

That was its original purpose for the people in the nation of Israel is to give them a sense of place in God's plan. I finally heard repeated for the first time in a long time, but it struck me when Admiral Stockdale, when they had the first vice presidential debates back many years ago, and Admiral Stockdale had his chance to stand up in the vice presidential debate, his first words before all the cameras and all the people of the world there were, Who am I? Why am I here? And a lot of people chuckled over that. But those are the fundamental questions of life.

Who am I and why am I here? The nation of Israel coming out of bondage in Egypt, hundreds of years of subjugation and hardship, needed a sense of identity, needed to

know who they were and why they were here. And God gave Moses the opportunity and the inspiration to write the book of Genesis. First of all, the first recipients was that generation in Israel to give them a sense of place.

This is who you are. This is why you're here. You're not serving some tribal deity, some local Canaanite god represented by an idol on some hearth in a little forgotten borough in Canaan.

You serve the God who created the universe. That's what the first two chapters of Genesis tell us. He's not just another in a pantheon of available gods to be served.

He is the God, the one and only God who knows all and sees all and has a purpose and a plan not only for the human race but for each individual within it. The stories of the patriarchs. Why does 78% of the book of Genesis consist in the stories of the patriarchs? You have the first 11 chapters giving you the prehistory of man up through and through the flood.

Beginning in chapter 12, you have Abraham and you have the patriarchs and the genesis of the nation of Israel. What's the point? What's the purpose in dwelling on that? It is the upward half of the parabola. If you know what a parabola is, it's a swooping downward line.

It's like if you took an egg and put it point down on a tabletop and traced the bottom edge, you have a U-shape there. You're descending down to the depths up to a certain point and then that curve levels out and begins an upward swing. Well, Genesis beginning in chapter 3 goes down that slope and heads to the very bottom at the point of the flood and the aftermath of the flood where just when you think things are looking up, they aren't.

But beginning with Abraham and the promises God makes to Abraham in chapter 12, we begin the upswing. We begin to see the plan of God's redemption unfolding. We've seen the downward spiral of mankind left to himself.

Man apart from God. Man without divine provision. But Abraham, a man who believes God, who through faith and obedience takes advantage of God's love and God's interest and God's grace.

We begin to see this upward curve culminating at the end of the book in Joseph who fulfills so many of the patriarchal promises. God does the same for us. He has seen us in our depravity.

We have seen ourselves in our depravity. And this pattern in Genesis is one that we can claim ourselves. Many times we're discouraged by our failures.

We know our own selves pretty well. So does God. But we also know that God's strength

is made manifest in our weakness.

And to the extent that we acknowledge our weakness and claim God's provision and God's strength, to that extent, we individually fulfill the same promise and the same opportunity that the human race has, that the nation of Israel has, as we see it in the book of Genesis. So it is food for thought. Can we live our lives day by day by day remembering that it is as though, and I think in fact it is true, we are being written into the pages of a great Bible.

We are a Bible story figure. Our lives serve as an example uniquely and individually of human failure, human inadequacy, and the grace of God. To what extent are we going to be a great success story? A story that reflects the image and glory of God.

That's our opportunity every day is to determine how that story is going to be written. We will figure in some future book of Genesis, if you will. And what kind of story are we going to reflect? Are we going to be an Esau, an Ishmael, a Reuben, a Levi, a Simeon? Or are we going to be a reflection of that pattern of redemption and fulfillment that we find in Abraham and Jacob and Joseph, Noah, Enoch, and many of the other figures.

We make that choice. From this day forward, the story has not been written yet. It all depends on what we choose, what we prioritize, how real the things of God are to us on a day-by-day basis.

That's the challenge. That's the opportunity that we are confronted with as we look at the book of Genesis and as we conclude its study. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer and we'll pause and take our break.

Father, we thank You for the privilege that we have of occupying this place in Your plan, in an infinite plan. There is a sense in which each of us are at its center. And we find ourselves there because of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the firstborn among many brethren. He is the one who has made it possible for us to avail ourselves of Your grace and Your perfect redemption. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make these things alive to us in our thinking so that we can reflect Your glory and fulfill Your purpose in the days ahead.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.