

GENESIS

BLESSINGS AS YOU BEGIN

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INTRODUCTION

Beginnings are usually exciting. When we begin a new job or begin a vacation, we are often filled with anticipation and excitement. Relationships often have “all the feels” in their nascent stages, and even our own children are most endearing in their early years—when their cheeks are still soft, their fingers are still sticky, and their hugs still involve every limb on their bodies. Diets are easiest on the first day and hardest every day after that. Budgeting is fun on payday, but it stinks a few days later when you want a new pair of shoes.

I recall a popular reality show in which all contestants were self-proclaimed survival experts in one way or another. The objective of the game was to be the person who could last the longest by himself or herself out in the wilderness. The first episode of each new season was always telling, and pinpointing who was going to make it past the first night became easier each time my family and I sat down to watch the show. There were those who seemed like they drank a six-pack of energy drinks right before the initial “drop” into the wilderness. Full of enthusiasm, those were the contestants who usually bailed quickly. The more subdued contestants, surprisingly, tended to last much longer in the woods.

Although there were a host of reasons that contestants pulled themselves out of the game, a frequent impetus for their hitting the bail button seemed to have been a profound disappointment with the adventure they signed up to have. They were caught off guard by how much they missed their families. They were discouraged by the chronic hunger and the difficulty of finding calories to consume (I don’t seem to have this problem in my daily life). They got angry at being cold and wet from rampant storms, and their fury was further exacerbated at losing a promising catch of fish or being taunted at night by wildcats.

The thing I’m learning about beginnings is that I am easily seduced by their pretentious nature. Like many contestants on the wilderness reality show, though, I get upset and panic when trouble sets in almost immediately. I remember calling our pediatrician one

day when I was a brand new mom; I cried on the phone to her and asked her if I should worry about my beautiful son. She asked me to explain his symptoms, and I told her that he was crying sometimes when he wasn't hungry or wet or tired. Bless her for not laughing me off the end of my static-filled cordless phone! Instead, she gently assured me that all babies cry and that my mommy instincts were fine-tuned enough to know if there were an emergency. Having sons was my dream come true, yet I was panicking because one of them was crying. Surely, something was wrong?

Our tolerance for pain, for struggle, and even for tragedy is severely limited when we begin new ventures. We welcome the blessings of favor, of Providence, and provision, but we are less hospitable to blessings that come with a touch—maybe a heap—of pain. Genesis certainly showcases conspicuous blessings, but I love God for divinely inspiring the never-sought-after-and-rarely-appreciated blessings to be written into this story of beginnings.

The beauty of Genesis—an entire book of beginnings—is that we see blessings persist in spite of hardship. Actually, sometimes the blessing IS the hardship. My prayer is that you will embrace this raw glimpse we get of God's beginnings with man and that you will, in faith, believe that He is God of your beginnings, too.

➤ SECTION 1 ➤

BLESSINGS WE CRAVE

LESSON 1

The Blessing of Creation: A Close-up of God

(Genesis 1-2)

In the early 1950s, an African American woman named Henrietta Lacks had an unrelenting cancer. Poor and barely educated, she turned to a renowned research hospital for treatment. During the experimental treatments, doctors quietly discovered the holy grail of biocellular research—cells that wouldn’t die. Mrs. Lacks’s cells self-replicated at astronomical rates, and this scientifically sacred anomaly quickly populated a vast body of scientific research. Despite the destruction they brought to her physical body, the HeLa cells (a name synthesized by the first two letters of her first and last name, a common method of nomenclature for cell samples) were produced en masse and soon became a staple in science laboratories all over the world.

Join me in picturing the sterile lab where a young scientist meticulously unwraps the package from today’s mail. Retaining both the acne and awkwardness from puberty, Dr. So-and-So had nearly choked in horror earlier when the mailman tossed the small parcel on the counter. “Be careful!” he had squeaked. Grabbing the package and cradling it like a newborn baby, Dr. So-and-So swore he heard Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” as he gently began unwrapping the package.

In it are the immortal HeLa cells. Until now, he’s only ever read about them; today, at long last, he is holding them in his very hands. Imagine the paternal care he takes as he gingerly situates the new vials in a lab rack he’d emptied yesterday just for this purpose. He can’t help but hover. And be amazed. And stare. And dream of new creations.

* * *

Read Genesis 1 and 2

The first time we see God in Scripture, He is “moving over the surface of the waters” (1:2, NASB). An equally accurate verb that many translations offer is “hovering.” God was *hovering* over water. With the same intensity as the HeLa scientist, God arched Himself over

water. The Psalmist depicts the voice and glory of God as reaching “over many waters” (Psalm 29:3).

Was He, too, amazed? Was He dreaming of all the new beginnings yet to unfold? Did He get excited butterflies in His stomach as He mapped out a plan for time itself? Did He have to coach Himself to patience as He anticipated the final masterpiece—a man made in His own image? Eager to love, eager to fellowship, eager to *create*, was God choking back tears as He paced back and forth—as He *hovered*—over these waters?

Water. The only raw material that seems to have coexisted with God before the Creation days began. Even the sky hadn’t been formed yet. Only God and water appear to predate Genesis 1:1. When we open our Bibles, the only things between the Table of Contents and “In the beginning” on the first page of Genesis are *God* and *water*. Could this mean that the Holy Spirit of God has *always* dwelt near water?

Genesis 1 and 2 present a jaw-dropping account of creation—of the sun, of plants, of the platypus. Yet I am gripped the most by what is *not* created here. I am intrigued that Genesis never accounts for the creation of water itself. As a sinner who desperately needs God’s salvation, I am strangely comforted when I stop and think that the waters that washed over me when I confessed Jesus and was baptized into Christ were already in existence when time began. Before I had time to mess up the beauty of God’s creation, there existed the means to save me. Desperate for union with the masterpiece of humankind, God started the clocks of history with a swimming pool ready to receive us when we fell.

God knew all along that a plan for salvation would be necessary. A vehicle to bring us back to His heart was a prerequisite to Creation. In the same way that we can’t take English 102 in college without first taking English 101, God did not create man without first having in place the prerequisite means to *keep* man. When Adam and Eve disobeyed and sin entered the human race forever, God didn’t have a panic attack or have to Google “plans for redemption.” Water was already there, and He would begin building a track record of delivering people He loved by walking them right through it.

At the irreverent expense of Henrietta Lacks’s human right to consent—she died never knowing there was anything unique about her cancer cells or that medical research would now be catapulted into new realms of discovery because of a tissue sample collected from her cervix—the HeLa cells became the reason many lives would one day be saved. Many of the vaccines, treatments, and cures that seem commonplace to us in the 21st century owe their credibility to initial trials conducted on the HeLa cells. Our bodies have never known certain diseases because a preventative cure was already in place before we even needed it.

When God spoke into existence mammals and birds and breathtaking plant life, water was already there. *No wonder He hovered over the waters!* He would depend on them greatly to deliver His precious creation from all the trouble we’d make on this earth. From

the adulterous children of Israel to the miserable wrecks called you and me, God would use water to deliver, to restore, to cleanse.

Before He ever created any life at all, there existed in God's laboratory the means to save. Saving our lives was Plan A from the grand beginning.

What we learn about God . . .

1. He always was.

Read Genesis 1:1. Write out the first four words of the Holy Scripture.

Where was God on the day you were conceived by your biological mother and father?

2. He's pretty smart.

Read Genesis 1:3-27. List all the things that God created!

Does God seem to be enjoying what He's doing?

3. He likes company.

Read Genesis 1:26 and 2:18-25. What evidence is there that God desires fellowship?

What other Bible stories or passages remind you of God's desire for companionship?

What we learn from Creation . . .

1. Our failure was foreseen.

Read Isaiah 43:1-4. Describe God's plan for salvation.

What comfort does this bring you as you begin each new day in Christ?

2. Creativity is in our DNA.

Read Ephesians 2:10. Who planned out our new beginnings?

What hobbies do you have, or what hobby would you like to begin? Has it ever occurred to you that you get your creative side from God?

3. We have a part.

Read Romans 12:12-20. What is God's creative plan for His followers?

Do you struggle to believe that your gifts and talents are necessary in God's kingdom?
