

UNIT 5

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TO DWELL

IN THE HOUSE

OF THE LORD

“I Will Be with You”

by Micah Fries

We turned the corner, through the gate, into the driveway of the small, white house, just off the dusty dirt road. The yard was filled with children playing. We noticed a patio to our left as we parked. On the patio was a table, and at the table were six or seven children playing a game of cards. One of the young children was wearing a Kansas City Royals T-shirt, and we knew immediately—that was our son.

We had been in the process of adopting for four long, hard years. We knew that God wanted us to adopt, but the process had been agonizing. Finally, we got word that the adoption was official, and we could leave the next week to go pick him up. In advance of our arrival, we sent a care package to him: a box filled with clothes and pictures and other items that we thought he might enjoy. As big fans of the Kansas City Royals baseball team, we sent a shirt and a hat, which is how we identified him as our new son upon our arrival.

When we brought him into our home, his entire world changed: He changed locations, moving to the U.S. He changed languages, learning to speak English. He changed sports teams, being introduced to U.S. football and baseball. And he changed his family and name, assuming our last name and becoming a part of a nuclear family after growing up in an orphanage until that point. There is very little of his world today that is similar to his previous life in Lesotho. He now had a family, he had a home, and he was safe and secure in his new identity.

RUNNING FROM GRACE

In the latter part of the Book of Exodus, we see God establishing Israel as His people, calling them to dwell with Him and giving them His expectations for them to live as His family. He gave them the law. He granted them His provision. He helped them understand how to live with each other in love.

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In return, God commanded them to behave as members of His family. They were to stop worshiping idols. They were to function in God-honoring ways toward each other. They were to dwell with Him and to declare Him to the world around them.

The Lord kept His end of the commitment. Unfortunately, Israel did not. Everything changed for them in a wonderful way as they left slavery in Egypt, but in spite of God's care, His family struggled to honor Him rightly.

God's people who had been given such great privileges, and for whom He had assigned great responsibility, did what we humans always do—they ran away from God and His covenant privileges. They failed in the wilderness: they broke God's law, they worshiped idols, and so on.

We do the same thing today. God gives us His grace, and we are prone to run away. This is why the hymn writer Robert Robinson penned these words in "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing":

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above.¹

We are all prone to wander. But when we see Israel wandering, we see God pour out even more grace. In Exodus 16–17, they run away from Him in fear, complaints, and despair, yet God remains gracious in His responses. As we see ourselves in the contemptuous Israelites, then, we should find welling up in us a desire to worship our Lord. The deeper our awareness of our own sin becomes, and the more intensely we understand God's grace, the more we should find ourselves running to worship Him.

My own kids, both biological and adopted, have blessings and privileges that come with being a part of our family, and they also have responsibilities. Yet even when they fail in those responsibilities, they do not fail to be loved.

God is the perfect Father: loving, patient, and gracious. He holds out chance after chance for His people to learn and obey so they will share in the joy of His responsibilities and privileges. And even when they fail, God's love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8).

Robinson was right in his assessment: If he (or we) are to have hope for the eternal future, it will only be because God, in His grace, has secured our future in spite of our stumbling. We are terribly flawed and broken sinners. And God still loves, pursues, and works to perfect us.

THE GREATEST PROMISE

For quite some time I have been convinced that the single greatest promise in all of Scripture is the promise of God being with us. It's a dominant theme in the Bible, from the garden of Eden, where God walked with Adam and Eve and then removed them from His presence as a penalty for their disobedience, to the construction of the tabernacle, and later the temple, where God's presence could dwell with His sinful people.

We see God's promise of His presence in the coming of Jesus, the ultimate example of God coming to us, and, of course, the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension. Finally, though, we see it in the eternal promise of what is yet to come in Revelation 21:3-4, when Jesus comes again and God's dwelling is with humanity forevermore and nothing will be able to separate us from Him or diminish our joy in His infinite, holy presence.

This is the remarkable promise of God to those who are His children. He will be with us, and He desires to be with us so much that He secures us twice—first through creation and then through adoption. By faith in Jesus, we are made a part of His family. In the end, He will again come to us, and we will live forever in eternity with Him. Until that time, we are called to live as His representatives, as members of His family. And when we fail in that responsibility, we watch as He loves us anyway, and that love leads us to worship.

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