



If Only by Melissa Brogdon

Who can relate to the often-spoken words, "if only"? If only I had money, if only I was younger, if only I had a better education, if only...

At one time or another most of us can relate to an "if only" mindset. And as we look throughout Scripture we see many people struggling because they allowed "if only" to become a part of their vocabulary...Abraham...if only I had a son, Samson, if only I had the girl, Cain, if only I had the acceptable sacrifice....If only's are often attributed to an external environment, something out of reach. Yet this is often misplaced blame, because for most the issue is at the heart of the man not his atmosphere...and we can see this as we look back to the first people of the Bible, because for them...if only wasn't an environment they were created in.

Adam and Eve lived in paradise, they had companionship, they had work to do and most importantly they walked and talked with the God of the universe. They had an idyllic life and yet they still longed for more. Their great distress wasn't a lack of provision but a lack of faith. They didn't take God at His word and longed for something greater. And they soon came to realize that an "if only" mindset comes with grave consequences.

In Genesis, chapter three we read of those consequences: they fell and with them, all of humanity. If only they had known they could step into that fateful day with the power of God guiding them and filling them with His peace. If only they believed He was enough for them, if only He was enough for us...

If you choose to walk with an "if only" mindset do not be surprised when your journey soon includes the companions of "if only", despair, bitterness, and stagnation. The further you walk with these betrayers of truth the farther you are from God and the course He has set for you to fulfill. This is why life as a believer should include times of deep prayer and evaluation of the state of our hearts and environment. And I believe one of the many verses which can help us overcome the "if only" mindset is found in Romans 5:6-11.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him. For while we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life. Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. This passage of Scripture begins where we should, at the brokenness of a man's heart. Without God we are ungodly and powerless. Yet at the cross we experience the greatest exchange to have ever taken place, where Christ's sacrifice leads to our redemption.

So, Romans helps us to reflect on our past state of being for a moment but then prompts us to shift our gaze to the hope Christ has set before us. It is easy to look down on our first parents and pass judgement, but just like Adam and Eve, we can stumble into a "if only" mindset. Yet we can trust that God will provide for us in the same way he did for His first children. Because he is a loving and just God, they were given discipline. Yet He didn't send them away from Eden without provision; He covered them... with the skins of the animals He covered them...

And this is what He still does for us today. Not with hide of a dead animal, but the transforming power of His Word and the sanctifying presence of His Holy Spirit. The first chapter of Ephesians declares in detail all the spiritual blessings we receive in Christ. And those blessings not only cover us, but they provide us with tenacity to withstand every shade of color that the leaf of life may turn. It is then that the chains of an "if only" mindset fall away and every "if only" becomes therefore... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).



Cool down this summer with Women's Summer Bible Studies...

Time to slip on your sandals, shorts and cotton tees as the heat climbs. Grab a girlfriend and a cold drink and attend one of our Women's Summer Bible Studies. Choose from one of the many topical studies of six to eight weeks length, call the leader to register, and get excited for an amazing small group experience! Connect with other women you don't know, while immersing yourself in a topic of your personal interest! A full list of classes coming soon on our website!

In Her Shoes by Lindsey Carroll, Driven By Grace

Thursdays, 9:00 - 11:00am | May 15 - June 19 | RiverLakes Church

Leader: Rachel Ortiz (661) 342-9441 | Cost of Book: (\$22 Printed Book) (\$20 Digital PDF)

Childcare Available

The purpose of this study is to help mothers study God's Word and look at real-life biblical women for lessons in motherhood and marriage. We will start by spending a few lessons studying Proverbs 31 and what it means to be a virtuous woman. After understanding Proverbs 31, we will then study the lives of four key mothers in the bible: Eve, Sarah, Hannah and Mary.

Now & Not Yet by Ruth Cho Simons

Thursdays, 6:30pm | May 22 - July 3 | 8516 Northshore Dr, 93312

Leader: Tiffany Gillies (661) 496-9896 | Hostess: Jennifer Anderson (661) 220-3971

Cost of Book: \$12.65 on Amazon (leader will have a few on hand)

Childcare not Available

Pressing in when you're waiting, wanting, and restless for more.

The New Answers Books 1, 2, & 3 with DVDs by Ken Ham & Bodie Hodge, Answers in Genesis

Thursdays, 9:15 - 11:15am | May 22 - July 10 | 13401 Smoke Creek Ave, 93314 (note: cats live here)

Leader: Donna Dungan (661) 578-0661 | Hostess: Linda Casavant (661) 549-2556

Cost of Book: \$0 (Book is not required. We will watch a series of short videos, then examine each topic using a study guide.)

Childcare Available

Evolution—intelligent design—creation—or a little of all three? What do you really believe and why does it matter to your life, your family, and your faith today? Explore topics like: the age of the earth, dinosaurs, radioactive dating, and the Genesis flood. Discover answers that reach core truths of the Christian faith.

Boundaries by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

Tuesdays, 6:00 - 8:00pm | May 27 - July 22 | 10005 Laurie Ave., 93312

Leader: Tina Haas (661) 619-4364 | Cost of Book: \$21 (both workbook and participant's guide)

Childcare not available

Drawing on principles from the Bible, the Boundaries Participant's Guide takes small groups on a journey of discovery and practical application so that you can answer tough questions like:

Why do I feel guilty about setting clear boundaries?

What if the boundaries I set hurt the other person?

Is it difficult for me to hear no from others?

What are examples of legitimate boundaries at work and home?

How can I have good boundaries online?

As a participant, you'll learn how to live more fully and display truth and love more freely. Each of these nine interactive sessions corresponds with a video presentation by Cloud and Townsend (companion DVD, sold separately).

This Participant's Guide is packed with insights, exercises, and group discussion questions that can profoundly improve the quality of your relationships in every sphere of life—marriage, family, friendships, church, and the workplace.