

Storyteller

GALATIANS

CALLED TO BE FREE

Storyteller
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THE STORYTELLER SERIES

God could've chosen to reveal Himself in any way that He desired, yet in His wisdom, He chose to reveal Himself in the context of a story. We come to know and understand this reality as we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and begin to see the entirety of Scripture as one interconnected story. By becoming familiar with the individual stories of Scripture, we train ourselves to see each as one part of God's big story.

Storyteller is a series of devotional and group Bible study experiences designed to take people through Scripture in a way that is beautiful, intuitive, and interactive. Each volume uses a book of the Bible or a portion of Scripture from within a book to examine a key theme. This theme guides the Bible study experience and gives readers handles to help understand and digest what they're reading.

At the end of each study, you should have a deeper understanding of God, His Word, the big themes of Scripture, the connectedness of God's story, and His work in your life.

Let's enter the story together.

ABOUT GALATIANS

AUTHOR

The apostle Paul is the author of the letter to the Galatians. This view is rarely disputed. In the first three words, Paul identifies himself as the author, and everything that follows is consistent with what we know about his life and theology from other New Testament writings.

Paul was a highly educated Jewish Pharisee and Roman citizen who was dramatically converted to Christianity in AD 35. Chosen by God to proclaim the name of Jesus to Jews and Gentiles alike, Paul lived the rest of his days faithfully carrying out that purpose.

BACKGROUND

Because the term “Galatians” was used both politically and ethnically, the exact location of churches to which Galatians was written is less certain than its authorship. Most likely, however, Paul wrote to the churches in southern Galatia that he had helped plant on his first missionary journey. This included the cities Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:14–14:23). Paul had received word that these churches were now being taught—and had begun to accept—a false gospel.

DATE

Galatians was written sometime between AD 48 and AD 56, depending largely on the view one takes of the location of its original audience. However, because the book's contents address the same topic discussed at the Jerusalem Council in AD 49 (Acts 15), yet does not mention that meeting or its conclusions, it is likely that Paul wrote Galatians in AD 48 or 49 before the Jerusalem Council had occurred. This view dates Galatians as one of the earliest New Testament books.

PURPOSE

After Paul had started churches in Galatia, he got word that false teachers had come behind him to undermine the gospel message and Paul's apostleship. These Judaizers insisted that Gentile converts must be circumcised. They taught that to live in the freedom of grace was, in fact, lawless and sinful. Understanding the essential nature of the matter, Paul wrote to clarify and defend the gospel of grace. Paul wanted the Galatians to know they were justified and empowered to live in holiness by Christ alone—not by any works of the law.

WHY STUDY GALATIANS?

The human need for spiritual correction happens fast and often.

Less than two decades after Jesus died and resurrected, the apostle Paul wrote Galatians to Christians who were beginning to think they had something to do with their own salvation.

In 1517, Martin Luther's study of Galatians prompted him to write 95 theses on a piece of paper and nail it to a church door in Germany. He wanted to get the attention of Christians in his day who also thought they had something to do with their own salvation.

Reformation was needed, and so that continues today. The specific applications that demonstrate our wrong understanding change, but the reason for them stays the same—we are often tempted to think we have something to do with our salvation.

Even when we say we believe we are saved by grace, our faith practice often shows a different view.

We make certain religious practices necessary for salvation, determine to continue in our salvation through self-effort, or believe it is up to our own ability to enact spiritual change in other people. These, and more, are false gospels that need correction.

In 1674, Jodocus van Lodenstein put it like this: "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi Dei* (the church is reformed, and is always [in need of] being according to the Word of God)."¹ The same is true for each individual believer in Christ.

And the message of Galatians is where reformation always begins.

1. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim, eds., *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey* (Escondido, CA: Westminster Seminary California, 2012), 116-134, quoted in Kevin DeYoung, "Semper Reformanda," The Gospel Coalition, October 27, 2016, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/semper-reformanda/.



OUTLINE OF GALATIANS

I. The Imperative of Grace (1:1-9)

II. The Authenticity of the Gospel Message (1:10–2:21)

III. The Way of Salvation (3:1–4:31)

IV. The Implications of Freedom (5:1–6:10)

V. The Effect of the Cross (6:11-18)

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each week follows a repeated rhythm to guide you in your study of Galatians and was crafted with lots of white space and photographic imagery to facilitate a time of reflection on Scripture.

The week begins with an introduction to the themes of the week. Throughout each week you'll find Scripture readings, devotions, and beautiful imagery to guide your time.



WEEK 6
FREE TO
DO GOOD



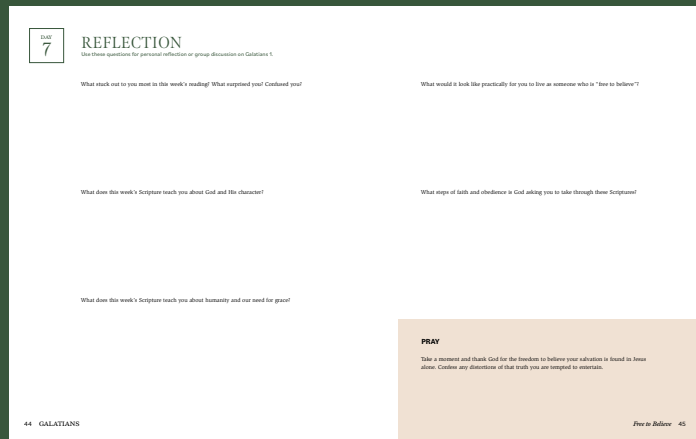
Each week includes five days of Scripture reading along with a short devotional thought and three questions to process what you've read.

The Scripture reading is printed out for you with plenty of space for you to take notes, circle, underline, and interact with the passage.



The sixth day contains no reading beyond a couple of verses to give you time to pause and listen to what God has said through the Scriptures this week. You may be tempted to skip this day all together, but resist this temptation. Sit and be quiet with God—even if it's only for a few minutes.

The seventh day each week offers a list of open-ended questions that apply to any passage of Scripture. Use this day to reflect on your own or meet with a group to discuss what you've learned. Take intentional time to remember and reflect on what the story of Galatians is teaching you.



Throughout each week of study, you will notice callout boxes or supplemental pages provided to give greater context and clarity to the Scripture you're reading. These features will help you connect the story of Galatians to the bigger story of Scripture.

LEADING A GROUP

Each week of study contains a set of questions that can be used for small group meetings. These open-ended questions are meant to guide discussion of the week's Scripture passage. No matter the size of your group, here are some helpful tips for guiding discussion.

PREPARE

REVIEW the Scripture and your answers to the week's questions ahead of time.

PRAY over your group as well as the Scriptures you've been studying. Ask God's Spirit for help to lead the group deeper into God's truth and deeper in relationship with one another.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

We live in a time when our attention is increasingly divided. Try to see your group time as a space and respite from the digital clutter—from scrolling, notifications, likes, and newsfeeds. Commit to one another to give focused time and attention to the discussion at hand and minimize outside distractions. Help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small group experience has the following characteristics.

EVERYONE IS INCLUDED. Your goal is to foster a community where people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES. Even though you may be "leading" the group, try to see yourself as a participant steering the conversation rather than a teacher imparting information.

DON'T RUSH. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People may need time, and we should be glad to give it to them. Don't feel like you have to ask all the questions or stay away from questions that aren't included. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and to one another. Take your time.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking other people to share when they have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. Conversation stalls when people feel that you don't want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer. Engagement and affirmation keeps the conversation going.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. The questions in this study are meant to steer the conversation back to God, His Word, and the work of the gospel in our lives. Opinions and experiences are valuable and can be helpful, but God is the center of the Bible, the center of our story, and should be the center of our discussion. Trust Him to lead the discussion. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING

Spiritual growth occurs in the context of community. Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Your group will be more enjoyable the more you get to know one another through time spent outside of an official group meeting. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending. Reserve time each week to touch base with individual group members.



WEEK 1

FREE TO BELIEVE

No other “gospel” saves.

The best books hook you from page one.

Maybe that's why many people consider Galatians a favorite among books of the Bible. Only a few sentences into the letter, the intensity becomes clear. The same issue and intensity resonates now, more than two thousand years later.

What we know and read today as the book of Galatians is a preserved letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Galatia, a region in the Roman province of Asia which included the cities Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. The Christians in this region faced struggles Christians endure today too.

The believers in Galatia were free to believe they were loved and redeemed by God by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. *So are we.* But they struggled to fully embrace that freedom. *So do we.* Prominent voices inside and outside the church were teaching contrary to the freedom found in Jesus. *Voices like these are so prolific today that sometimes we don't even recognize them.*

The apostle Paul caught wind of the opposing view, and he was moved to respond with force to remind the Galatians of the freedom they had in Jesus. So begins chapter 1 of his six chapter defense of the gospel of grace.

The truths presented offer an equally profound effect for every person's life today.

They are, in fact, a matter of life and death.

We're surrounded by different "gospels." And God calls us daily to turn them all aside to freely believe in the only gospel that saves—the gospel of grace.

GALATIANS 1:1-5

GREETING

1 Paul, an apostle — not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead — ² and all the brothers who are with me:
To the churches of Galatia.

³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. ⁵ To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

DAY

1

RESCUE STORY

Paul typically began his New Testament letters with words of affirmation for his audience. He told the Romans they were “loved by God, called as saints.” The Corinthians were “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” The Ephesians were “faithful saints.” And he called the Colossians “faithful brothers and sisters.”

The Galatians received no such pat on the back.

Because they questioned the most essential teaching they’d received, Paul got straight to the point. He outlined his authority and cut to the chase.

The appeal to his authority as an apostle is essential to the contents of the letter. An apostle is someone sent by God to exercise a specific kind of leadership in the New Testament church. Like the other apostles, the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to Paul and called him to the role of apostle. The gospel message is their message—salvation comes from Jesus alone.

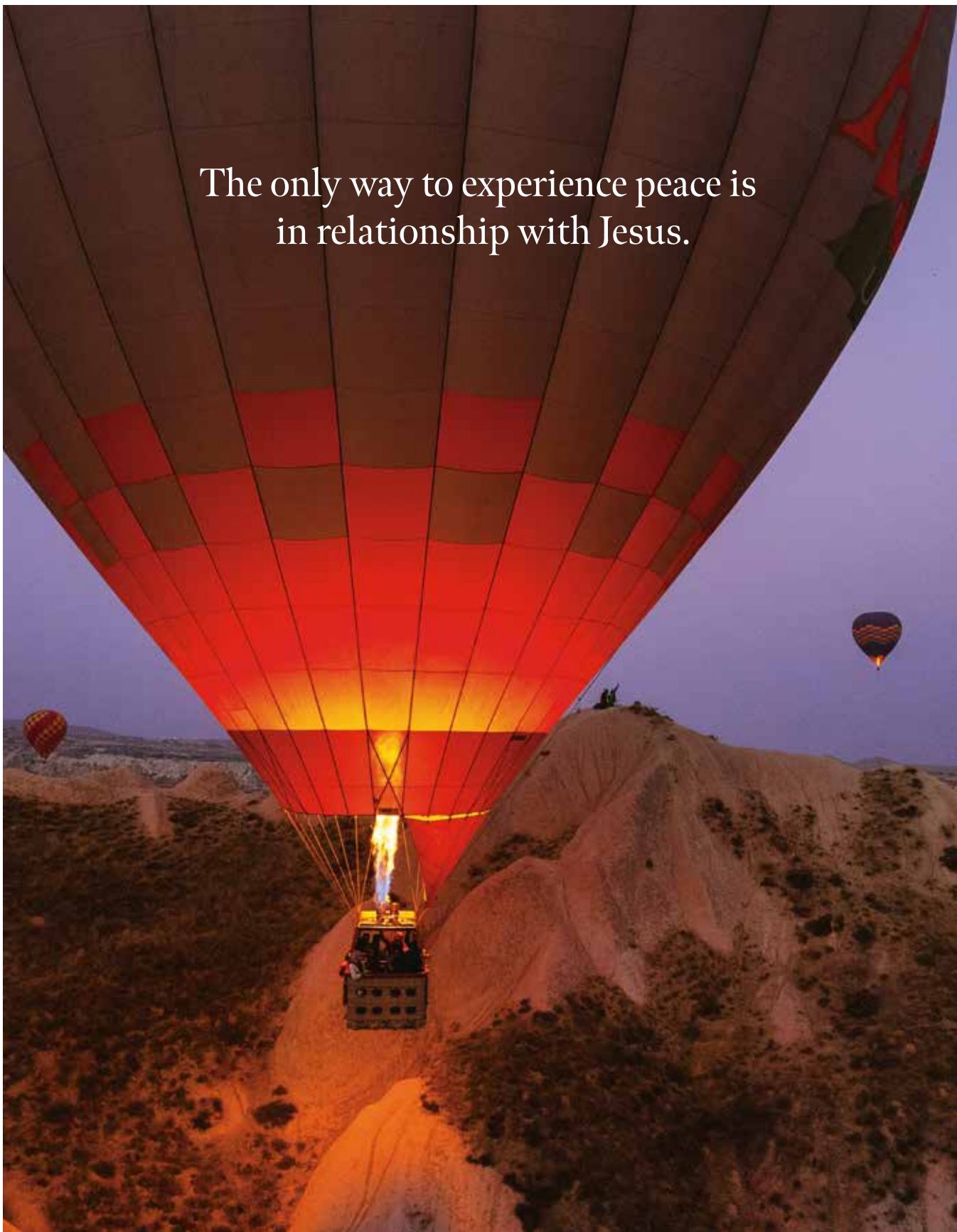
The gospel message Paul taught brings the grace and peace that Jesus offered and we all desire. In fact, we can’t experience those blessings any other way.

The good news of the gospel begins with grace—the unmerited favor of God—given to us by His Son, Jesus. Peace is the implication of that grace. On our very best day, sin utterly defeats us. In our own ability, power, and ingenuity, we have no hope of rescue—ever. But we do have hope.

Jesus died in our place to rescue us.

The grace that rescues us from death gives us the peace of new life. We can’t earn our way to God—to try to is an exhausting pursuit. But Jesus provides another way. God came to us to call us to the kind of freedom that only He can offer. This is good news, for the Galatians and for us.

The only way to experience peace is
in relationship with Jesus.



REFLECTIONS

What do we learn about God in these five short verses?

In His sovereignty, God has now made you the recipient of Paul's letter to the Galatians. What message does He want you to hear in these first five verses?

How would you counsel someone who is struggling to find peace?

TRACING THE STORY

The New Testament writers paired grace and peace in their letters as an introductory greeting seventeen times. The majority of those are followed by the words “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the Old Testament, Isaiah 54:10 and other passages refer to God's promise of spiritual freedom as the “covenant of peace.” Galatians echoes the overarching message of Scripture—in an act of pure grace, God sent His Son Jesus to free humanity from the bondage of sin and restore our peace with Him.

GALATIANS 1:6-10

NO OTHER GOSPEL

⁶I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — ⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! ⁹As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!

¹⁰For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

DAY

2

TRUE STORY

Finish the following sentence: I am amazed that some people who claim to believe in Jesus _____.

We are all sinners saved by grace and seeking to step forward in the peace that grace brings. At the same time, we have expectations of ourselves and other Christians. If those expectations are founded in the grace and peace of Christ, we don't need to apologize for them. The New Testament writers certainly didn't.

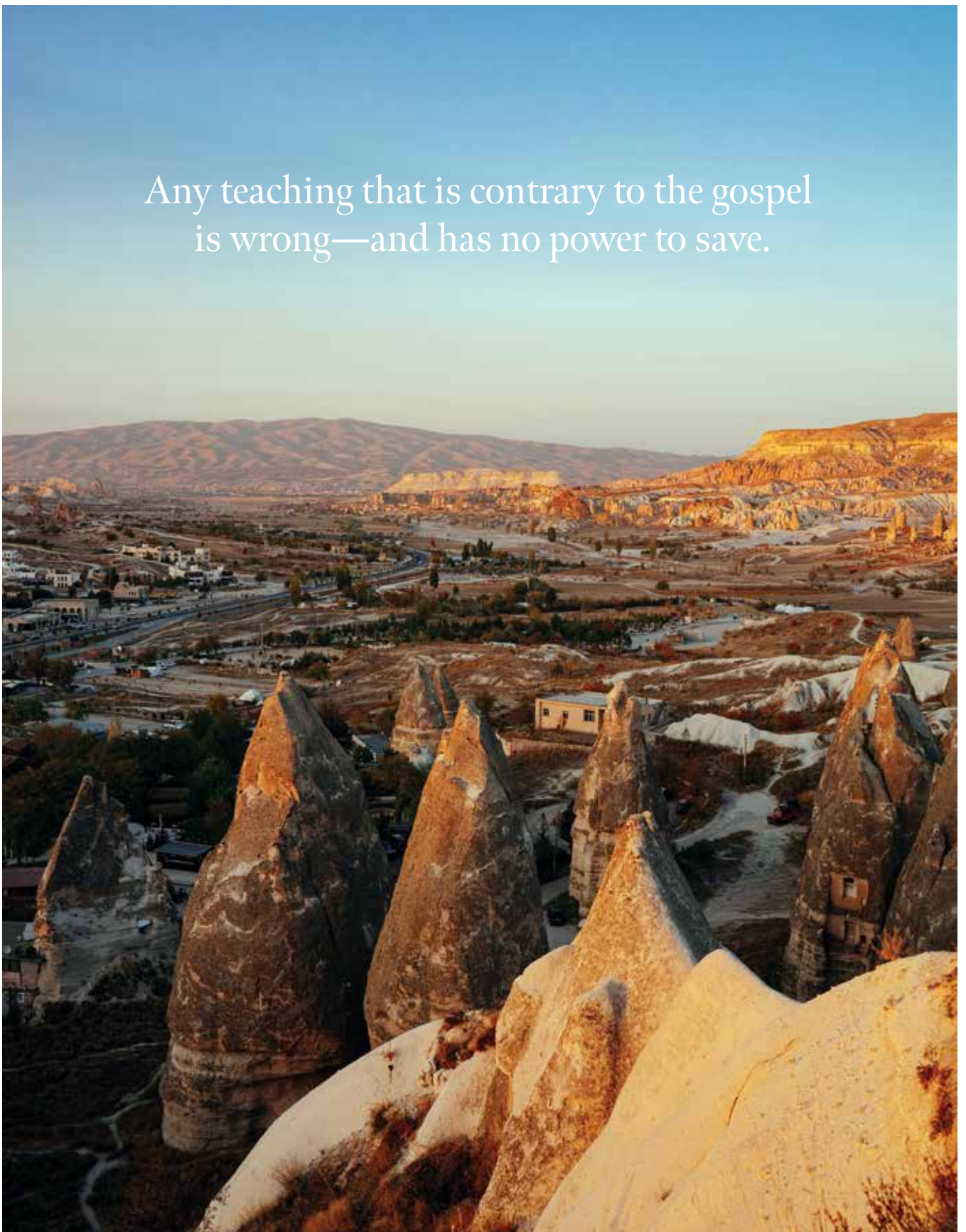
To say the gospel comes to us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ simply means the gospel comes to us as an unearned gift from God (by grace) because of our belief and trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (through faith in Jesus Christ). The real gospel is no more and no less than this. Any "gospel" that adds to or takes away from this is no gospel at all.

The opening of the letter finds Paul amazed, and not in a good way. Not long after leaving Galatia, the church in that region turned to false teaching. They began listening to teachers who gave a message that conflicted with the gospel of grace. This "different gospel" added requirements of the Jewish ceremonial law to salvation.

Paul didn't water down what was happening. This was serious business, made clear when he used the word *cursed* to describe those who participated. Any teaching that is contrary to salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ is wrong—even if that teaching is given by the most eloquent, persuasive, impressive, and intelligent person you've ever met.

There are terrible consequences for every person who accepts a false gospel (Hebrews 2:1-4). Whether we add rules Jesus never intended or water down the truth to suit cultural norms of behavior, we are missing the richness that can only be found in the only gospel that saves.

Any teaching that is contrary to the gospel
is wrong—and has no power to save.



REFLECTIONS

In your own words, what did Paul mean by, “If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (v. 10)?

Based on Galatians 1:6-10, what would it look like for you to please God and serve Christ this week?

What does it mean, practically, to “distort the gospel of Christ” (v. 7)? How can you avoid it?

Turning Away

We always have and always will have the freedom to believe.
And we always have and always will be tempted toward unbelief.

GALATIANS 1:6-8

⁶I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — ⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!

PROVERBS 14:12

¹²There is a way that seems right to a person,
but its end is the way to death.

Adam and Eve . . .

... turned from God's loving instruction to the serpent's cunning deceit.

GENESIS 3:1-8V

Israel . . .

... turned from God's future promise to their oppressive past.

NUMBERS 14:4

... turned from worship of God to the worship of worthless idols.

JEREMIAH 2:5-7

... turned from God's voice and shut their ears so they could not hear.

ZECHARIAH 7:8-12

David . . .

... turned from his pursuit of God's heart to his own selfish desires.

2 SAMUEL 11

Many disciples . . .

... turned from Jesus and no longer followed Him.

JOHN 6:66

Peter . . .

... turned from Jesus to fear and self-preservation.

LUKE 22:55-62

Some people . . .

... will turn from faith to deceitful, demonic teachings.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2

Many people . . .

... will turn from the truth to what they want to hear.

2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4

All people . . .

... can turn back to God in repentance and be restored in Jesus Christ.

ACTS 3:19-21

GALATIANS 1:11-12

THE ORIGIN OF PAUL'S GOSPEL

¹¹For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. ¹²For I did not receive it from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

DAY

3

ORIGIN STORY

Change is a constant in life.

People grow. Technological advancement changes our rhythms of life. Words and vernacular shift in meaning. Trends and fashions come in and out of style then back into style again.

But the gospel isn't like that.

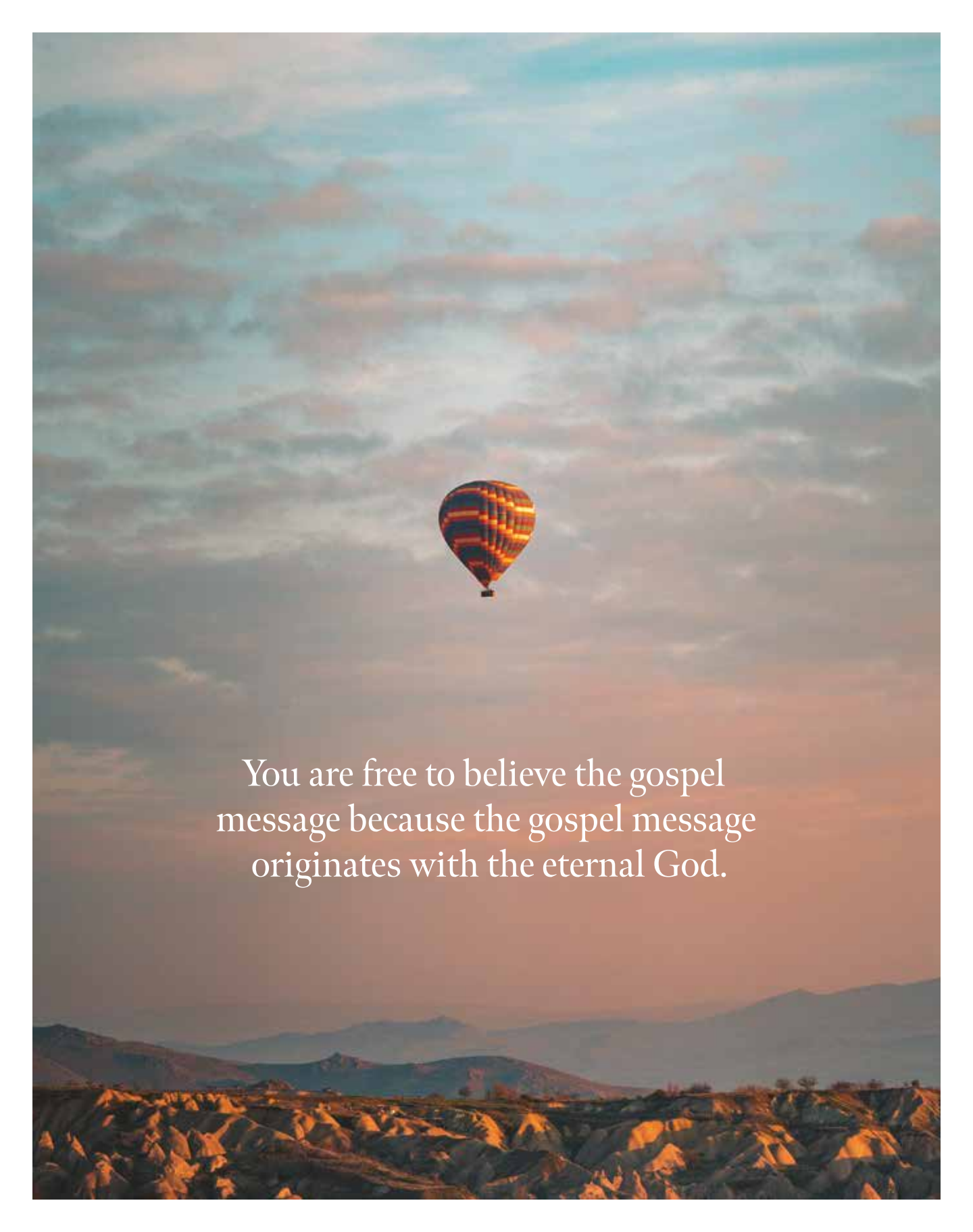
The Galatians had heard Paul's message and then right behind him came a different teaching. More than confusing, it was dangerous. Paul wanted them to know the gospel doesn't evolve into new, better strategies. The gospel doesn't have a human origin, so it doesn't need human reinvention. It came directly from God.

This was, and is, an important statement of fact. Some people were preaching a false gospel. The Galatians could know it was false because it came from the teachers and circumstances around them. In other words, it had a worldly origin.

The message Paul preached wasn't something he or anyone else had made up. He hadn't learned it from a trendy philosopher of his time. He hadn't gleaned it from the lyrics of a popular song. No church group had formulated the plan. Paul hadn't even learned it in a seminary class. Instead, he received the gospel directly from Jesus Christ.

The message Paul taught was different from the message from the teachers who came behind him. They were legalists, because they wanted to add to the law. The gospel differs from any human message in character and content because it has a divine origin.

We are free to believe the gospel message because it comes to us from God and He gives it freely. What He defines, we don't get to redefine. If we do, we're wrong.

A hot air balloon with a colorful, striped pattern is floating in the center of a vast, cloudy sky. The sky transitions from a pale blue at the top to a soft orange and pink near the horizon. Below the balloon, a rugged, rocky landscape with jagged peaks and valleys is visible, bathed in the warm light of the setting or rising sun. In the distance, a range of mountains stretches across the horizon under a hazy sky.

You are free to believe the gospel message because the gospel message originates with the eternal God.

REFLECTIONS

Why was it important for the Galatians to know the gospel message came from God?

Why does the gospel's origin give us freedom to believe it?

What "new" messages from the world tempt you to divert your attention from the true gospel?
How can you guard against giving into that temptation?

TRACING THE STORY

Jesus was with God in the beginning, and Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1-2,14). From the beginning, God began to reveal the gospel message (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; 17:6-8). Jesus, who was with God in the beginning, is the fulfillment of the law. God's plan to redeem people from their sin and separation from Him is fulfilled, once and for all time, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 8:3-4).

GALATIANS 1:13-17

¹³ For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵ But when God, who from my mother's womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus.

DAY

4

PERSONAL STORY

Paul probably wished he had a different story. It couldn't have been easy to recount the horrific acts he had previously committed against Christians. But we see here in Galatians, in Paul's other letters, and in Acts that he shared his story again and again.

Why would he choose to publicly revisit the greatest regret of his life? Why would he risk the emotional vulnerability such transparency would invite? Why would anyone?

Paul shared his story in its truest, ugliest form, because his story was a clear picture of the power of the gospel and the change Christ brings. The gospel freed Paul from a bad story and replaced it with a better story.

By grace, God reached into Paul's destructive heart and set him on the path of life. By grace, God called Paul out of darkness, revealed Jesus to him, and set him apart. As such, Paul's story didn't end in ugliness. It became a beautiful and powerful story. The gospel changed Paul's life, and he fought to keep that message clear and available to all.

Every Christian's story is one of grace and power; it's the story of abandoning the shackles of sin for the boundless hope of freedom with Jesus.

The gospel is a God-inspired story, and it is also every Christian's personal story. That's true whether you are the greatest missionary the world has ever known or a new convert in Galatia where different teachings confuse your understanding. It's true whether you grew up going to church every week or rejecting God entirely. None of us are the sum of our choices; we are the products of Jesus's care for us.

We are free to believe the gospel because the gospel story has the power to change our story. In this sense, we all have the same story—and each story reveals beautiful evidence of the power of God's amazing grace.

A low-angle view from inside a hot air balloon basket looking up at the burner and the envelope against a sunset sky. The burner is a large, cylindrical metal structure with a grid of holes, emitting a bright, intense flame that rises vertically through the center of the balloon's envelope. The envelope is a large, light-colored fabric structure that is partially inflated and held in place by ropes. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is dramatic and evocative.

Every salvation story reveals
the power of God's grace.

REFLECTIONS

What does Paul's story teach you about the power of God's grace in Christ?

What is your faith story? How did your need for grace show up in your life? Through what circumstances did God's plan, power, and beauty demonstrate themselves in your life?

Is it difficult for you to share your story of faith? What benefit would other people gain from hearing it?

GALATIANS 1:18-24

¹⁸Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I didn't see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰I declare in the sight of God: I am not lying in what I write to you.

²¹Afterward, I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²I remained personally unknown to the Judean churches that are in Christ. ²³They simply kept hearing, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy."

²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

DAY

5

POLARIZING STORY

These days, if we want a message to gain traction, we must build a platform—grow a social media following, host a podcast, connect with noteworthy people, or write a book. To disappear for three years of solitude and then spend a couple of weeks with one notably outspoken person would surely cause the opposite effect.

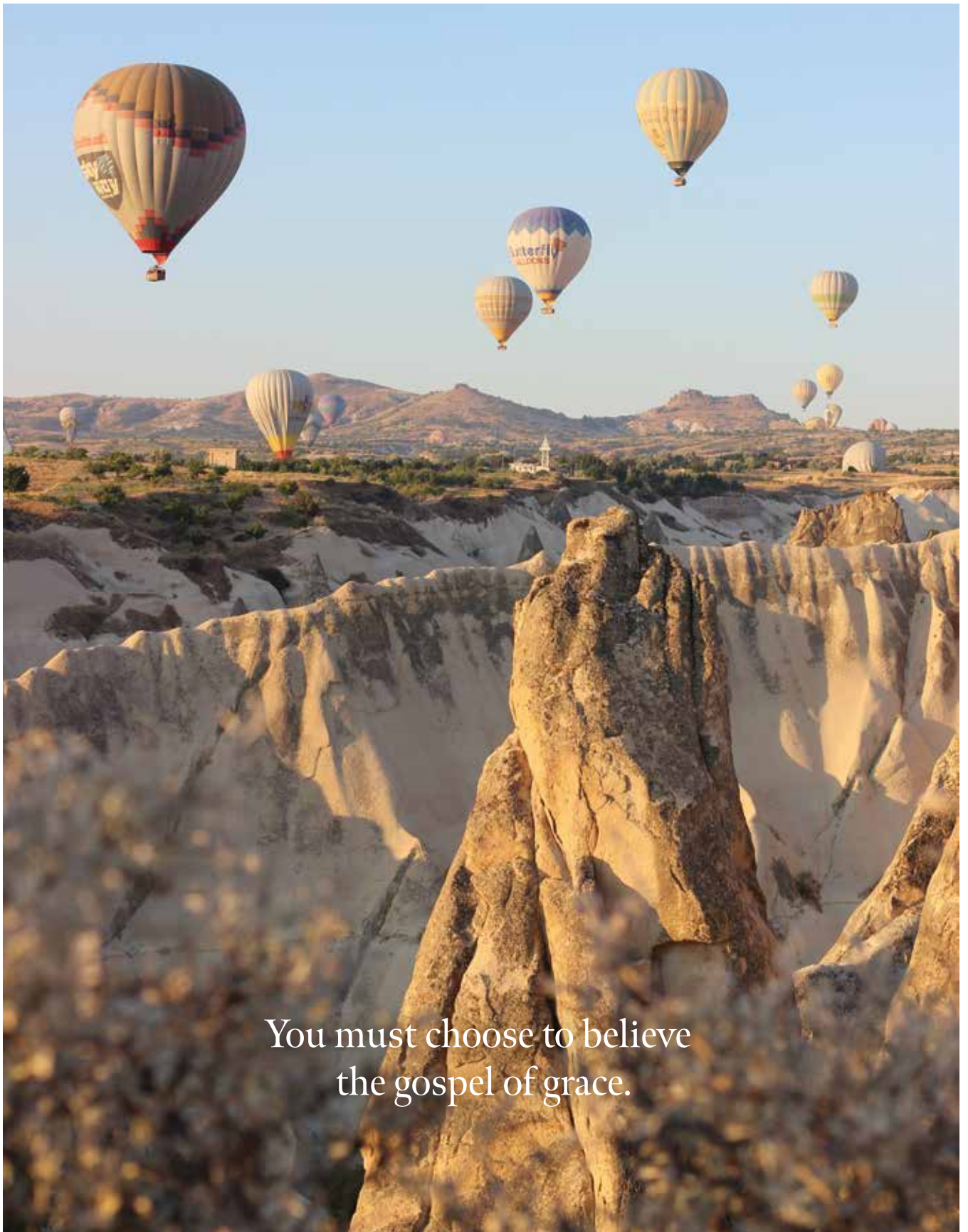
But that's exactly what Paul did. His personal story didn't include building a name for himself by rubbing elbows with Galatia's annual list of the most influential people. Instead, he'd avoided everyone for three years. Then he spent fifteen days with Peter (called Cephas in this passage) and shook hands once or twice with James before heading back into a place where he was largely unknown.

Paul explained this to the Galatian churches to help them understand the validity of his teaching. Paul's teaching came to Him from Jesus, not the apostles, yet it was unified with the gospel message the apostles preached. In his days as a Jewish teacher and leader, Paul was known for his strict adherence to the Jewish law and his zealous persecution of Christians. He built that name for himself through years of effort.

The gospel gave Paul the freedom to stop building a name for himself and to learn about Jesus and build his new faith in obscurity. His new belief in Jesus cost him his platform and threatened his life.

While Paul enjoyed those brief moments with Peter and James, he learned of a plot against his life (Acts 9:29). Opposition to the gospel had come quickly. The incredible change that had taken place in his life was spreading. He had gone from persecutor to preacher, and people responded in different ways. Some praised God; others plotted his death.

The gospel was polarizing in Paul's day, and it is polarizing now. But it is also freeing. It frees us from platform and frees us from who others expect us to be. And it frees us to glorify God in the way that He has called us to.



You must choose to believe
the gospel of grace.

REFLECTIONS

After converting to Christianity, why would Paul have spent three years alone with the Lord?

What does Paul's personal process of learning teach you about your role in spiritual growth and the freedom to believe?

Paul went from persecutor to preacher. What about you? Name one change that has taken place in your life since you chose to believe the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. What has the gospel freed you from?

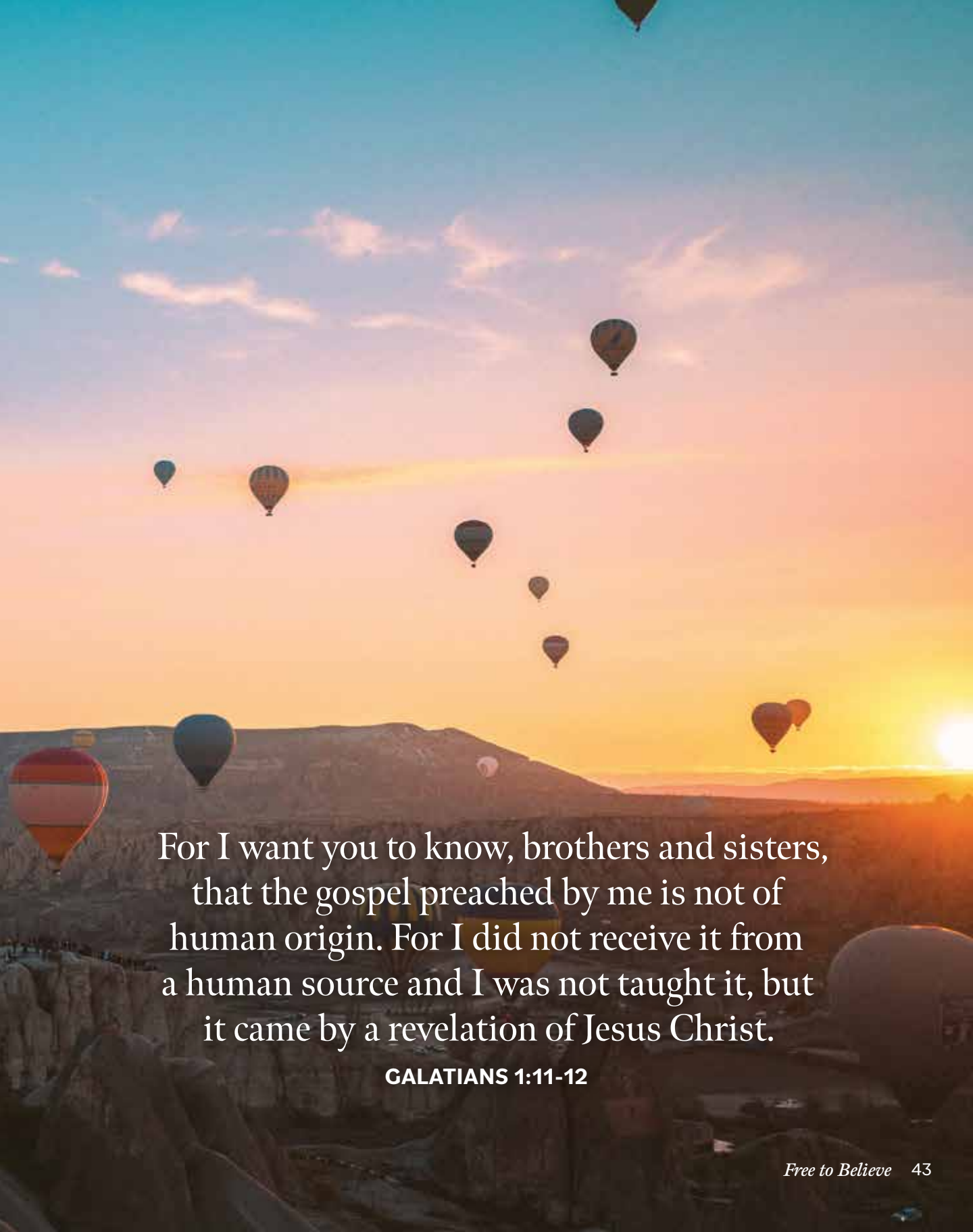
DAY

6

PAUSE & LISTEN

Spend some time reflecting over the week's reading.





For I want you to know, brothers and sisters,
that the gospel preached by me is not of
human origin. For I did not receive it from
a human source and I was not taught it, but
it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

GALATIANS 1:11-12

DAY
7

REFLECTION

Use these questions for personal reflection or group discussion on Galatians 1.

What stuck out to you most in this week's reading? What surprised you? Confused you?

What does this week's Scripture teach you about God and His character?

What does this week's Scripture teach you about humanity and our need for grace?

What would it look like practically for you to live as someone who is “free to believe”?

What steps of faith and obedience is God asking you to take through these Scriptures?

PRAY

Take a moment and thank God for the freedom to believe your salvation is found in Jesus alone. Confess any distortions of that truth you are tempted to entertain.