

# Session 4: Israel's Calling

## Introduction

“The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ reframes everything, bringing hope, life, and meaning to every part of human culture. And yet many of us can't see how our faith shapes much of everyday life and experience.”<sup>1</sup>

“Sunday to Sunday, the in-between days, where was Jesus?”<sup>2</sup>

“I didn't think about the whole of who I am, what was I passionate about, or how God uniquely made me.”<sup>3</sup>

“What are God's purposes for us? What does it mean to be made in the image of God? How do we live in the world, but not of the world?”<sup>4</sup>

“God wants to make us more ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

“He is holding all things together, and that he is reconciling all things to himself.”<sup>6</sup>

“We're exploring, 'How does the biblical story reframe our story?'”<sup>7</sup>

“We live out of our stories.”<sup>8</sup>

“So be located in the story, the biblical story, in which God reveals himself, his character, and his life.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mayhew, Marketplace Institute, Regent College. (Mark is one of the main presenters of this Series.)

<sup>2</sup> Hugo Ciro, CEO of Level Ground Trading, Victoria, BC.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Lee Buchholz, Consultant and Board Member, Restavek Foundation, Falls Church, Virginia.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mayhew.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Boersma, Professor of Theology, Regent College.

<sup>6</sup> Amy Sherman, Author, Kingdom Calling, Senior Fellow, Sagamore Institute.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Mayhew.

<sup>8</sup> Rikk Watts, Professor of New Testament, Regent College.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Williams, Professor of History, Regent College.

“Throughout this course, we’ve been asking the question, ‘How does the Bible reframe every aspect of our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?’ ‘How does our faith connect?’”<sup>10</sup>

“We started in the first session at the beginning, in Genesis, and we discovered that God has a big vision and purpose for humanity and creation. He made us in his image as kings and priests to care for creation and be culture-makers. And even though sin entered into the world, it did not negate God’s original purposes for creation. But sin is real, and has had a catastrophic impact. Sometimes it seems that all of culture is broken and frustrated. We can feel very small in the midst of huge problems. How can we be faithful to God in such a messy world?”<sup>11</sup>

*Rich Dean’s Story*<sup>12</sup>

I suppose my greatest fear starting out as a lawyer was that I would lose my faith – that I’d had this wonderful experience in college and law school and had terrific training, been part of a great church, and then somehow I would get out into the world, and I would lose that enthusiasm for Christ.

“Rich Dean has been practicing law for over 30 years in Russia, Australia, and now in Washington, DC.”<sup>13</sup>

When I was in law school, there was a segment of my peer group that viewed going to work for major corporations, or frankly, going to work for major law firms, like I was doing, as sort of selling your soul. It kind of made you think, you know, am I really doing the right thing with my life? Is this a good thing or not? There would be then examples that would be highlighted in the corporate world that would be held up as reasons why all these people were without any moral fibre and would do anything for profit.

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<sup>10</sup> Erin Antosh, The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation, and Culture. (Erin is one of the main presenters for this Series.)

<sup>11</sup> Mark Mayhew and Erin Antosh.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Dean, Lawyer, Washington, D.C.

<sup>13</sup> Erin Antosh.

My particular era, it was the Ford Pinto cases, which are now a bygone part of history. But Ford had this Pinto, it's been long discontinued, but it was a very successful car. The only problem was it had a fundamental design flaw, where they put the gas tank too near the rear bumper, so in rear end collisions there were frequent explosions and fires. Faced with this, at Ford, they made a judgment, at least initially, not to redesign the Pinto. Obviously, this would bother anybody, right? I mean, I wasn't unique in feeling like this is not right.

“Rich was meeting regularly with Tom Skinner, a well known pastor in New York City.”<sup>14</sup>

“The problem is we take our hangups and we deliver them to other people. We can't do that. If God puts people in particular things pray for those people and let them be salt there. Let people be in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

I remember one night, at one of these dinners with Skinner, we were sitting around and somehow this case came up and I said, “You know, I would never go to work for Ford Motor Company. I would not want to represent Ford Motor Company.”

And Skinner just... he was a big man, and I remember him just leaning back in his chair and he said, “Well, tell me this: would it be any different if you were in the board room?”

I said, “What are you talking about?”

He said, “Well, I want to know. What if you were in the board room? Would the decision be any different?”

And I thought, ‘What are you asking me this for? I don't want to be in their board room.’ But he was so provocative, he caused me to fundamentally adjust my thinking about this and begin what for me was a long path of ‘What does it mean to be in the workplace, trying to do the right thing? Was there a way to bring my faith into that, that would... could it make a difference?’

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Mayhew.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Skinner, Pastor, New York City.

“Many of us feel that the problems of the world are just too big and that it’s impossible for people like us to make a difference. What does the Bible have to say about this? In this session, we’re going to look at the next big chapter of the Bible, the story of Israel, to understand how God goes about redeeming a messy world.”<sup>16</sup>

Genesis 12:1 – 3

*<sup>1</sup>The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

“Story is one of the ways we form identity, one of the ways we develop a self understanding, and not just self understanding, but understanding of who God is and what God is doing – what his purposes are for creation and for its creatures, which is us. And yet, for all the importance of story, we live in a day and age where the biblical story, and perhaps especially the Old Testament story (where I have a vested interest), is largely forgotten. And it’s not just the biblical story that’s forgotten. As Elizabeth Achtemeier has written, ‘We are living in the midst of a society and a people who have lost the story of their lives altogether.’ And yet, as French philosopher and Christian mystic, Simone Weil observes in one of several books she wrote in her thirty-four years of life, ‘To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.’”<sup>17</sup>

Now, against this backdrop, we are hoping today to convince you that there is some good news – some very good news indeed. In fact, we have a story. In fact, we have a family history. As the Apostle Paul stresses in a few places, we who are followers of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, are children of Abraham by faith. Whatever may be our biological family history, whether we remember much about it or not, we have a

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Mayhew.

<sup>17</sup> Phil Long, Professor of Old Testament, Regent College. (Phil is the main speaker for this session.)

spiritual family history that involves God's mission to redeem and repair a broken world. God's story is our story because he's invited us to be a part of it.

My task is pretty simple. All I have to do is cover 1,800 years of the Old Testament story from the call of Abraham to Jesus. So, following the precedent and in pursuit of this key theme: How does God work to redeem a broken world? I want to follow Matthew's genealogy, which will give us a bit of structure, and I want us to look at the history from Abraham (c. 1800 BC) to David (c. 1000 BC), from David to Exile (c. 586 BC), and from Exile to Jesus.

So, from each of these stages I want to emphasize a key truth about how God pursues his redemptive mission in a messy, broken world. How he moves his story, which is also our story, along. And I hope we'll see these three key things:

- First of all, we're going to notice that God moves his story along by calling ordinary people to trust him.
- And he keeps that story moving, even when people fail him.
- And he brings the story to glorious fulfillment in Jesus. Indeed, he guarantees a happy ending.

My hope is that we will come away more convinced than ever that because God guarantees the forward movement of his story, which is our story, we can embrace life with joy and freedom. So, let's begin our race through the Old Testament story.

## **Genesis 1 – 11**

In just eleven chapters we read of God speaking the world into existence – an ordered existence – and placing humanity at its centre; we read of the first humans' catastrophic fall into sin, and of paradise lost. Relationships become strained with God, with others, with the natural world. By Genesis chapter 6, human wickedness has become so rampant, that God expresses grief for having made humans at all. And only Noah with his family is spared in the flood of judgment by which God wipes

the slate clean. But God's judgment is not all we see in the story of Noah. We also see his mercy.

Immediately after the flood, God makes a covenant promise. It's one of... It's the first of many covenant promises that we will see. To Noah, he promises never again to destroy all living creatures by flood. This covenant promise affirms God's concern, not simply for people, but for the whole of creation. God has a plan – a plan to redeem a people for himself and to heal the world that has been, in part at least, spoiled.

So, what's the plan? Well, to answer that question we need to move to the call of Abraham.

### **Abraham to David**

Genesis 12:1

*The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you."*

Abraham, a man of Mesopotamia – the southern Mesopotamian city of Ur – a man of his own time, a mere individual, is called by God to trust him and obey him. God doesn't specify what he'll be showing Abraham. He doesn't tell him when or where he'll show him a land. He just asks him to pull up stakes, leave his family and his homeland, and go wherever God directs.

So, Abraham is told to go, and he goes. And we witness the first of these three great truths about how God moves his story along. He moves it along by calling individuals simply to trust him and, trusting him, to obey him. As with Noah, so with Abram, God again makes a covenant promise. If you will but trust me, God says,

Genesis 12:2 – 3

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

Blessing upon blessing, not just for Abraham, but for all of humanity. God's full promise to Abraham is sometimes summarized in three words: seed, land, and blessing. Before Abraham's descendants can grow into a great nation, he'll need to have descendants – seed. And he'll need to have a place to put them if they're to be a great nation – land. And for that to happen, he needs God's blessing because here's the deal, when Abram received this charge – this promise – he was already 75 years old. And Sarah was only ten years younger. God's promise to Abraham seemed beyond belief. It seemed laughable. And the text tells us that both Sarah and Abraham did, at some point, laugh. But you know, nothing is impossible with God. And so, after further decades of waiting, God fulfills his promise of a seed by giving them a son and instructing them, perhaps with a bit of laughter on his own part, to name him Isaac, which in Hebrew means *laughter*.

Isaac, in due course, becomes the father of Jacob and Esau, and by the end of the book of Genesis we find Jacob blessing twelve sons who, in due course, become the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The promise of a great nation is beginning to take shape.

But here the plot thickens. Jacob's favourite son, Joseph, is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, and he ends up in Egypt. Here he eventually rises to a high position, because God is with him. God hasn't forgotten him, even in his distress. He hasn't forgotten the promise he made to Abraham and his descendants. God then uses Joseph to save many lives during a seven year famine. And ironically, among those whose lives he saves, were those very brothers who had sold him into slavery. Joseph's father and brothers eventually settle in Egypt, and over a couple of centuries become a great multitude.

When an Egyptian king who doesn't remember Joseph, comes to power, he presses these descendants of Abraham into slavery. But God doesn't forget them, nor his promise to Abram – the promise that he would make them a great nation, that they would be a blessing to all nations. So, God begins to call other individuals, and the first is the famous Moses.

Under Moses' leadership God delivers the people out of the land of Egypt and they begin a trek through the wilderness – a long trek to the land of Canaan, that God had promised. Along the way, they come to Mount Sinai, and there, God makes yet another promise. This time his promise is not to an individual, but to an entire people. The family has grown, and many people have actually joined the family. And why does God make a covenantal promise? Well, his goal remains the same. He wants to form a people who can live in right relationship with him, a people to be a light to the nations, a people to be his redemptive agents seeking *shalom*, that is right-relatedness, in all aspects of their life together – in their agriculture, in their architecture, in their sexual ethics, in their creation care, in everything. They're to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and not just in the religious sphere, but in all of society.

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“How God calls Israel is just a fascinating reflection of how we very rarely really get the fullness and understanding of who God is and what he does. These are not a unique people in certain ways, they're not already a powerful nation; they are, in some sense, in the huge scope of humanity, an insignificant group in an insignificant world, in an insignificant time period, like all of us. At some point in our lives, we're all insignificant people in an insignificant world in an insignificant time period. And yet God chooses. And yet God calls. And I do believe that's a reflection of how God is found in the ordinary as well as in the extraordinary.”<sup>18</sup>

“It's important to look at the Old Testament and not to take it as God's ideal blueprint for a society. God is not saying, ‘This is what I want done everywhere at every time.’ God, instead, is working in history. Israel is meant to be an example to the nations of what a society can look like if Yahweh is its Lord. And in the Torah, we have law that looks like other ancient near eastern law, but it's also different. It's better. It's better to be a woman there than it is anywhere else in the ancient near east. It's better to be poor in Israel than it is to be anywhere else. It's better to be somebody of another ethnicity in Israel than it is to be anywhere else. And other

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<sup>18</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, Professor of Church Growth & Evangelism, North Park Theological Seminary.



nations can look at Israel and say, 'You know, that's possible.' So, Israel's living out the cultural mandate of a kind of *shalom*-making and *shalom*-ful way of life, parallel to the way the church is supposed to love each other."<sup>19</sup>

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So, following the covenant promises of Sinai and the giving of the Law and keeping with the pattern we're beginning to expect, the book of Joshua opens with yet another call to an individual. The book of Joshua, however, is not principally about Joshua, it's about God, and it's about God fulfilling all the promises that he had made to Abraham. He finally brings them into a land – the land of Promise.

In the generation following Joshua, however, the people of Israel begin to lose their focus, and they lose their way. They begin to adopt pagan practices of the remaining inhabitants of the land – quite the opposite of the right-relatedness that God had in mind. The book of Judges, which follows the book of Joshua, recounts decades upon decades of depressing cycles of sin, subjugation, sadness, and all the while God continues to stick with his people. His plan is not going to be thwarted simply by human failure. But still, by the end of the book of Judges, the recurring refrain is, 'everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes.' Something has to change. And that change comes in the book of Samuel.

It's in the book of Samuel that we have the transition from judges to kings. It's in the book of Samuel that we meet that shepherd king, David. But not at first, because the book of Samuel doesn't begin with David or even with Samuel, from whom the book gets its name. It begins with Hannah. I find this remarkable.

Hannah is, in so many ways, an ordinary, average woman who, like many women then and now, found herself in a world of hurt. She was childless in a culture where bearing children was regarded as the epitome – the essence – of wifely fulfillment. And to make matters worse, she was not alone in her marriage to Elkanah. Perhaps because Hannah was childless, Elkanah had taken a second wife, Peninnah. And

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<sup>19</sup> John Stackhouse, Professor of Theology and Culture, Regent College.

she also wasn't particularly happy. Perhaps she had been married to Elkanah simply as a baby-maker. (Not something that's going to make someone particularly happy.)

Peninnah was resentful of Hannah, and she took every opportunity to make Hannah as miserable as she possibly could. And Hannah was miserable. She had some options. Elkanah had told her that he loved her. 'Is not my love for you greater than...more important than ten sons?' She had her husband's love. She could have used that as a weapon. She could have fought back, fighting fire with fire. Or she could have simply repressed the pain, pretended it wasn't so, and avoided Peninnah. But Hannah chose neither option, neither the fight option nor the flight option. Instead, she took her deep pain and her concern to God, and she poured out her heart to him. And here's the remarkable thing: From this honest engagement of an everyday, ordinary woman – a woman in pain, a woman of faith – God changed history. He raised up a prophet – Samuel. And this prophet Samuel would be the one to anoint Israel's first two kings.

So, again and again we see this pattern: God moves his story along by calling people, often very ordinary people, to trust him and obey him. Hannah was not a great leader, like Abraham, Moses, or Joshua. She was just a normal, everyday person tempted to despair, but she chose, rather, to trust and obey. So, with the ordinary faithfulness of ordinary people, God can do extraordinary things.

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"One of the wonderful things to me about the Bible is that there really are no heroes. Abraham and Sarah feed three strangers who happen to be God. They had no idea. They probably never did realize it. And then these stories of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and the brothers – they're all full of... people like us. They do stupid things. And they're still in the story. Nobody gets ejected. Do you realize that? Nobody gets thrown out."<sup>20</sup>

"I think in the west we really have a way of looking at the world that's hyper individualistic. It's the individual accomplishment that moves society. At least that's

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene Peterson, Professor Emeritus & Author, *The Message*, Regent College.

the narrative we often get. In the church we began to operate in the same way. So, we look for the superstar Christian by which we can measure our success. I talk quite a bit about my mom, who was never a pastor, never got a seminary education, but the spiritual giant that she is mainly because she prayed all of the time. My mom is 80. A few years ago, she showed me her knees, and I noticed that her kneecaps had split into multiple pieces because she had been so much on her knees – an hour, two or three hours a day – that the physical strain on her knees had essentially destroyed her kneecaps. But there she is every day, in her position of kneeling on the floor, furthering that faithfulness. And I think those are the stories that very rarely get told in Christian circles.”<sup>21</sup>

### **David to Exile**

Hannah was not a great leader, but she chose to trust and obey. Now, the first king that Hannah's son, Samuel, anointed is Saul, a tall and impressive man, the kind of king the people wanted. But Saul ultimately fails because with all his external qualities, he lacks any real trust in God, I believe, from all that the texts tell us. So, Saul fails again and again despite his good intentions at times, or at least at first. Again and again, he fails to trust and obey.

David, on the other hand, though handsome enough in his own right, is not a big man like Saul. David is easily overlooked. He isn't even invited when the prophet Samuel is sent by God to David's father, Jesse, to anoint one of his sons. Little David is left behind with the flocks. As David's big brothers file before Samuel, Samuel is impressed, but God has to remind Samuel not to judge by outward appearance. Humans look at outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. So, David is brought and anointed to be the next king – God's choice. And once eventually established as king and dwelling in his own house, David wants to build a house for God – he wants to build him a temple. But instead, God makes another remarkable promise: You'll not be building me a temple. You'll not be building me a house. But I

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<sup>21</sup> Soong-Chan Rah.

will surely build you an enduring house. What's more, your house and your kingdom shall be made sure before me forever. Your throne will be established forever.<sup>22</sup>

Even sin – David's or his descendants – will not ultimately derail God's gracious purpose to bless and to prosper this house of David and, through this house of David, the whole world. The arresting magnificence of God's promise to David has led many readers to consider this to be the theological summit of the Old Testament.

Well, as we know, David does sin, rather royally, you might say. Adultery and murder...kind of hard to top. How can we forget that sordid tale of David's crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah? And David's sons and his descendants also sinned repeatedly. But God never gives up. In David's case, he sends a prophet, Nathan, to expose to David the depravity of his own heart. And when David faces his own sin, he repents fully and genuinely. And God spares his life.

And so, here we see this second important truth: not only does call ordinary people to trust him, but he keeps his story moving, even when people fail him. God's onward march to redeem a broken humanity and to restore *shalom* is not ultimately derailed by human failure – by our failures.

So, to David and Bathsheba is eventually born Solomon. Solomon – that great enigma. Wisest man who was ever born, it says in 1 Kings 3:12. A man richly blessed by God. And yet, Solomon, incredibly, ends up turning his back on God. Or at least he turns from following God with all his heart. And how wise is that? How did that happen?

Well, the narrative rather subtly communicates to us that it happened gradually, incrementally, a little at a time. First, we read that Solomon began to marry foreign women. He married the daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh, even though God had said that Israel's king should not rely on political marriages. He begins to collect horses and chariots, even though God had said that Israel's kings were to trust in him, not in

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<sup>22</sup> See 2 Samuel 7.

military machinery. He begins to levy heavy taxes on the people of God, even though God had already richly supplied Solomon's every need and had explicitly said that Israel's kings were not to accumulate gold. Little by little, Solomon is corrupting relationships; he is destroying *shalom*. No big definitive leap of unfaithfulness, at least until the end; just repeated small steps of disobedience – small steps in the wrong direction.

After Solomon, the kingdom is divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom, called Israel, and the southern kingdom, called Judah. The northern kingdom lasted about 200 years, before being taken into exile by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom survived for another 150 years before being taken into exile by the Babylonians. These exiles found themselves again in a foreign land and, in essence, in slavery – a tragic and terrible ending, it seems, to a story that held such promise – a promise of *shalom*, of right relationships restored.

### Exile to Jesus

So, is that it, then? Is that the end of the story?

You can well imagine that those in exile, who were steeped in the promises of God, were asking themselves, 'Is that it? Is that the end of our story?'

Well, God had an answer, and the answer is 'No,' a resounding 'No.' God made a promise. He'd made a promise to Noah, and to Abraham, and to Moses, and to David. And God keeps his word. He never forgets his covenant promises, be they to a single person, a family, all of humanity, all of creation. So, how does God keep that promise? He keeps it by sending Jesus. Jesus, the Davidic King, the true Israelite, the Son of Abraham, the Redeemer and Reconciler of all.

<b>David covenant</b> (a person)	<b>Jesus</b> the Davidic King
<b>Sinai covenant</b> (a family/community)	<b>Jesus</b> the True Israelite
<b>Abrahamic covenant</b> (all peoples)	<b>Jesus</b> the Son of Abraham
<b>Noah covenant</b> (all creation)	<b>Jesus</b> the Redeemer of all

## Conclusion

Our race, and it has been a race, through 1,800 years of history, has revealed three key truths about who God is and about his program to redeem a fallen world.

- We have seen that God moves his redemptive story along by calling people – ordinary people like you and me – to simply trust him and obey him and when he says go, go.
- And he keeps the story moving along even when these ordinary people fail him, as we often fail.
- And he brings the story to glorious climax and fulfillment in Jesus.

We have a God worthy of all our trust. We have a God who is bigger than all our failures. And we have a Saviour who guarantees the happy ending. Could there be a better story to be part of than that?

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“For Christians, the story of Israel is part of our family history. We learn about a people called to be God’s people – to be a blessing and a light. But as people living after the coming of Christ, is the Old Testament really all that helpful to us today? The Old Testament often seems very different to the New Testament – confusing, difficult.”<sup>23</sup>

“I think it’s important to recognize that reading the Old Testament is dangerous. It’s dangerous because it is an adult book meant for adult readers. It deals with sex and violence and power and loyalty and betrayal and marriage and adultery and life giving and death dealing. But if you do read it well, it’s just full of power. It turns lights on. It does work – it gives you the outlook that Jesus and the apostles had and on which they built. And it’s just necessary.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Erin Antosh and Mark Mayhew.

<sup>24</sup> John Stackhouse.

“How do you make sense of the New Testament without the Old Testament? The whole canon of Scripture speaks to God’s character, and one of the key elements of God’s character is that he is faithful. I find it fascinating that Israel has so many faults, on one level. The entire history that you see is this repeated rebellion against God. And yet, God remains among them because he makes a covenant with them, and God has taken ordinary people like Israel, like the church today, and have done extraordinary things, not because we’re extraordinary, but because he’s an extraordinary God.”<sup>25</sup>

“The people we read about in the Bible are ordinary, regular people, like you and me. The story of Israel is a testament to the character of God in the ordinariness and complexity of daily life.”<sup>26</sup>

“Earlier, we saw that Rich Dean was afraid he’d lose his faith working for a secular law firm, but felt challenged to be God’s representative in the midst of our messy world. It wasn’t too long before he got his first chance to do this.”<sup>27</sup>

*Rich Dean’s Story cont’d*

We were representing a company whose Chief Executive Officer was going through a divorce.

“This company asked Rich to exclude a future bonus that the CEO was going to receive.”<sup>28</sup>

I said, “Well, why would we do this? What’s going on?”

And the guy I worked for said, “Well, our client told us that he’s in the middle of a divorce, and he does not want his wife to find out he’s making an extra 3 million dollars.”

I said, “Well, it doesn’t seem to me that that’s the right thing.” I said, “Moreover, I think it makes the law firm look bad.”

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<sup>25</sup> Soong-Chan Rah.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Mayhew.

<sup>27</sup> Erin Antosh.

<sup>28</sup> Erin Antosh.

And he said, "Look, we don't represent his wife, ok? We don't even represent him. We represent the company – our client – they're telling us what to do. Go do it."

I went back to my desk, and I wrote out this list and I thought, 'This is just, not right.' So, I went back to him, and I said, "Look, I'm not... I can't do this."

And so, he said, "I tell you what, let's take it to the head of the department."

I was a second or third year lawyer. I was like, 'what was I doing?' I made my case, and he thought about it for a few minutes, and he said, "Rich," he said, "Ed's right about this. We don't represent her. It's not our responsibility, but," he said, "we're not going to do it because it's just not right."

And I thought... I just felt sort of vindicated that it was ok to talk about what was right and wrong in that context. And it was just kind of a confirmation that what Skinner had put me onto, was just an important way of thinking about what I was doing. I think there are some kinds of opportunities for heroism, where you do the right thing and it's great and you right the wrong. But, the vast majority of situations are just, every day you're just sort of struggling with something that's just far more grey. Studying the Old Testament has helped me appreciate that fallible people are still used by God in ways that we really can't figure out – not in ways that I can necessarily see, or I may never see. But you trust our part of what God's doing.

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"We've learned that the story of Israel is the church's family history. It helps frame our understanding of who God is and how he calls ordinary people to trust him and be a blessing in the world today. The Old Testament shows us God's covenant faithfulness working out through history, even in the midst of a broken world. And this is a huge encouragement to us – that God is with us wherever we go. And in Jesus, he guarantees the ending. This is the climax of history, and our next exciting episode."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Mark Mayhew and Erin Antosh.