

“The Tree of Life” (Genesis 2:9)

How are you doing? Yangon is very quiet. The street I see through our window is very empty, there are only a few cars and people. We’ve just stayed at our place most of the time for the last 10 days. We stocked food. The fridge was totally full. We’ve been eating from our stock every day, and it’s becoming less and less. now we don’t have much left, kind of empty.

This unique experience reminds me of something. The life on this earth with this physical body is limited. I’m spending it day by day, and it’s becoming less and less, moment by moment. One day I have to leave this earth and say “good bye” to this body, and the fact is that day is coming closer daily. Am I ready for heaven? And, how well am I connected with the source of life?

The death is real, and we don’t know when and how it’ll happen to each of us, but the one thing we all know is that the day is coming closer. Are you ready for heaven? And, how well are you connected with the source of life?

Today, we’ll start a new series “The Tree of Life.”

Jesus said, “You have your hands in your Bibles constantly because you think you’ll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest of the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren’t willing to receive from the life you say you want” (John 5:39-40 MSG).

Here, “Bibles” and “Scriptures” refer to the Old Testament. In Jesus’ time, the New Testament has not existed yet. They had only the Old Testament.

In the form of Torah, or the first five books of the Old Testament, God revealed the source of eternal life, a Jew rabbi teaches.¹ Through the Torah, God guides us to the tree of life. The Torah teaches us how we can have a fullness of life, receiving the fruit from the tree of life, living in Jesus.

But many of us, somehow, missed it. Most of the time when we read the Torah, somehow we couldn’t get it. And then, we feel it is no point to read the Old Testament, it’s good enough to read just the New Testament. But you know your life has been missing something, it’s not fully growing, not blooming, not bearing fruits. You feel there is something wrong with your Christian life.

Does it sound familiar with you? If so, like me, this series is for you.

¹ Ari Kahn, *A River Flowed from Eden: Torah for the Shabbat Table*, (Kindle, 2015), 148-149

For the next couple of months, we'll unpack the Torah, or the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, and together we'll learn essential things for each of us to live fullness of Christian life and get vital, indispensable essence to grow in maturity to become all that God wants us to be.

1. The Tree of Life

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The Bible starts with the account that God created all things from absolutely nothing. God created the whole universe, stars and a moon, all kinds of plants, and all kinds of animals, birds, fish, and human beings.

Genesis 2:7

the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

God took some soil from the ground and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man became a living being. Then God made a garden of Eden. And He put the man in it.

Genesis 2:9

And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God made all kinds of trees, trees beautiful to look at and with fruit good to eat. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and so was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Here, I have a question for you. Could the man eat from the tree of life? What do you think? Okay, let's check it out in the Bible.

Genesis 2:16-17, "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (NASB).

Man was allowed to eat freely from any tree of the garden, from any tree, except one, that is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, logically, it’s okay for the man to eat from the tree of life. But this is very clear that they were prohibited from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

As we all know that they ate from it. And the consequence of it was death, and they were exiled from the garden of Eden. They lost the intimate relationship with God. And because of this, their identity was destroyed, and their relationship with others and relationship with God’s creation were damaged. Because of sin, death is everywhere, instead of life. That’s what we see and hear every day.

When we look at the very end of the Bible, Revelation 22, which talks about the new heaven and new earth, we can see there is the tree of life there, in the holy city. Revelation 22:14 says, “Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can enter through the gates of the city and eat the fruit from the tree of life” (NLT).

It means there is a way to enter the holy city, where the fullness of God’s holy presence and his glory are. And there is access to the tree of life. This is the gospel, our salvation, which is Jesus himself, he is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). In this sense, he is the tree of life.

2. The overview of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch describes God’s covenantal relationship with people, while each book is distinct and has its own particular subject matter.

This is a side note. “Torah” is a Hebrew word, meaning “law” or “teaching.” The Jews call the first five books of the Old Testament Torah. In Greek translations, it is called the Pentateuch, “the fivefold book,” “penta” means “five,” and “teuchos” means “volume.”

And, I’ve taken many from a book, “Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts.”²

² “Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts.” Tomas Nelson, Inc. 1993.

Let's look at the overview of the Pentateuch.

Gen. 1-11 talks about the accounts of creation and humankind's early history.

Gen. 12-50 mentions the lives of four generations: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

Ex. 1-15 shows the rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Ex. 16- Num. 21 describes Israel's rebellion and forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

And, Num. 22- Deut. 34 is about Israel's arrival at the entrance to Canaan.

I'll give you very simple outline for each book, and take the essential lessons for our Christian life. Today I'll talk about only Genesis, and next time I'll cover other four books; Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

	Location	Time	Main Character	Event
Gen. 1-11	all the earth		Adam	creation
				fall
			Noah	flood
				nations
Gen. 12-36	Canaan	Four generations	Abraham	
			Isaac	
			Jacob	
Gen. 37-50	Egypt		Joseph	
Ex. 1-15	Egypt	430 years	Moses	rescue
Ex. 15- Deut. 34	Wilderness	40 years	Moses	

Ex. 15-18	wilderness	2 months		
Ex. 19-40	Mount Sinai	10 months		
Levi. 1-27	Mount Sinai	1 month		
Num. 1-10	Mount Sinai	20 days		Old generation
Num. 10-25	wilderness	38 years		
Num. 26-36	plains of Moab	5 months		New generation
Deut. 1-34	plains of Moab	1 month		

3. Genesis

Genesis is the first chapter in the history of the redemption of man.

It starts with four events; Creation, Fall, Flood, and Nations.

Creation: God is the sovereign creator of matter and energy, space and time. Human beings are special in this creation as they are created in the image of God.

Fall: Originally all creation was good. But, the creation became bondage to decay through the sin of Adam. In spite of the overwhelming curse of the Fall, God promised hope of redemption through the seed of the woman.

Flood: As humans multiplied, sin also multiplied until God brought the flood to destroy all humans with the exception of Noah and his family.

Nations: After the flood, God scattered the peoples over the face of the earth. And they became nations.

And following that, chapters 12 to 50 talk about four generations, Abraham and his descendants, through whom God will bless the nations.

When we look at the four generations; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, none of them are perfect. But their lives prove that God is faithful to keep His Word, and that He is able to do what He said. And His presence was with them, no matter what kind of situation they were in. Time after time, He revealed himself to them, and spoke to them.

What are some ways in which God speaks? Eric Dooley, the founder of New Life Fellowship of Churches suggests some ways, from the least usual to the most common. Remember, God can speak however He wants. Our job is to listen and obey, not to presume how He should speak to us.

1) With an audible voice. Can you remember God spoke to a person with an audible voice in Genesis? There are many cases. Perhaps, you thought of the incident in which God gave Noah the instruction how to build the ark. Or maybe, you remembered how God gave his promises to Abraham.

2) Through dreams and visions. In Genesis God spoke through dreams many times. For example, He spoke to Joseph through dreams.

3) Angels. Do you remember God sent his messenger in Genesis? Abraham hosted angels and received the promise that Sarah would give a birth. And, two angels rescued Lot from Sodom.

4) Circumstances. God can speak through circumstances. What about Laban? How did he understand that marriage was the God's plan for his sister, Rebekah? Through circumstances. But, please don't confuse this with looking for "signs"! I'll talk about it later.

5) Godly counsellors such as pastors, elders, mature Christians. Isaac blessed his son, Jacob and gave a godly word when Jacob left home. And, that word of Isaac became an anchor for his journey. That word helped him to stay in line with God's covenant. Please don't confuse this with anyone who claims to be able to hear for you. You need to hear from God personally because you can hear from God. Godly counsellors just help and guide you to tune in to God's voice.

6) Conviction in the heart – "still small voice." Rebekah just had a conviction this marriage was God's will for her. She heard God's voiceless voice.

7) The most common way of how God speaks to us is through the Bible; personal reading, teaching and preaching, and memorizing scripture for the Holy Spirit to recall.

The Christian Essential (1)

Because God has reached out to man and wants us to have fellowship with Him, we can each know Him personally. It is important for each of us to know how to "hear God's voice."

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:11

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What is it like to be a Christian? He has peace with God. He rejoices in God. He lives in the right relationship with God, and that relationship reflects his relationship with others. That is Christians' life. So, Christianity is all about relationship.

Throughout history, God has been reaching out to man, trying to reconcile him to Himself. God has chosen to progressively reveal His nature, His character and His will to man, so that man might know, love and fellowship with God just as he was created to do so.

The wonderful truth is that now all men can know God and have fellowship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. We live in a truly unique time in human history because the revelation of God is complete in His Son and in His Word, the Bible.

Because of what God has done for us through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a man is justified by faith alone and not by works. One result of this is that each believer has access to God directly, apart from any human intermediaries. Because God wants to communicate with man, He has given us His Word, the Bible, which is the supreme source of authority for both faith and life.

When we read the Bible, God speaks to us, he shows his will in our mind.

This happened to me about 30 years ago. I was working for a company. It's challenging but I enjoyed my job. But the work was not easy. The harder I worked, the more I made mistakes. Within one year, I got into a state of serious depression. I couldn't see any value in myself. I couldn't see any purpose in my life, and I didn't know the reason for my existence. I thought it would be better if I didn't exist. I began to think about how I could cancel my life.

While I was in the darkness physically and mentally, Jesus spoke to me, "You are precious in my sight. I love you." I wanted to believe it, but I couldn't. How God the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth would say, "You are precious in my sight. I love you," as I myself can't see any value in myself, and don't love myself? But, in deep bottom of my mind, I wanted to believe it. So, I started to read the Bible, asking "God, can you show me how you love me?" I didn't understand much, of course not. But, each time I read the Bible, I felt God spoke to me as one sentence, one word, or one image touched my heart.

When we read the Bible, God speaks to us, he shows his will in our mind. And we can also hear God's voice through group bible study, listening or reading sermons, and also through Godly counselors. And as we looked at, in the Bible

you can find that God speaks through some other ways, too. But you must always check it with the Bible.

Before I end today's message, I want to share three warnings about hearing the voice of God.

1) Beware of the pitfall, "This thought just popped into my head so it must be God". There are three sources of thoughts: Natural thoughts, God, and the devil. You must check it with the Bible.

2) Don't look for "signs." Matthew 12:38 says, an evil generation seeks a sign. And the Devil uses signs to confuse Christians (Mark 13:22).

3) Selective hearing. You listen to what you like to hear, but ignore what you don't like to hear, or pretend you can't hear it. Most of the time, what you need to hear is what you don't want to hear. You can't continue to knowingly practice what the Bible declares to be sin in one area of your life and keep praying, "God show me what Your will is," in another area of your life.

Psalm 1:2-3

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

The point is to have fellowship with God. You need to develop how you spend time with him personally. It's just like you build up a relationship with your friends. There is no short cut. You need to take time and build up the relationship little by little, step by step, day by day.

For self-reflection

1. If you had only 24 hours left to live, what would you do? Who would you spend your last day with?
2. If you were asked "Are you ready for heaven?" what would be your answer? Why would you think so?

3. How would you describe your relationship with God, the source of life? What keeps you from spending time with him in your everyday life? How would you make it better?

4. Read Psalm 1:2-3. What does it speak to you?

5. Suppose you can hear God's voice; if you could ask God one question, what would you ask him? And, asking God that question, read the whole Bible through one year.