

Finding the Thread

By John Malham • Study download 5

SESSION 1 — PROLOGUE & CHAPTERS 1-3

Prologue

The Thread That Found Me

Theme: God was marking your story before you knew He was there.

READ FIRST — Open your Bible to these passages before continuing.

Psalms 139:16

"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

God was writing your story before you existed. Every chapter — including the ones you are most ashamed of — was already known. Nothing surprised Him. Nothing derailed the Thread.

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

God spoke this to people in exile — people who had lost everything and were convinced God had abandoned the plan. He had not. He never does. The Thread keeps running even when you cannot see it.

Proverbs 16:9

"A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps."

You plan. God directs. The disruption that looks like God abandoning your plan may be God protecting His. Trust the director more than the plan.

THE TEACHING

When the Pinelands Commission came after the land — threats of fines, legal pressure, accusations that could have crushed the business and the ministry — something happened that changed the way the whole story was understood. In the middle of that battle, God led back to a Bible that had been sitting on the desk for years. It had been brought by a young man from the paintball field, a paralegal who had been at a will-reading. An old woman had died and no one in her family wanted her Bible. It arrived full of pressed flowers, prayer cards for the dead, verses underlined until the ink was almost through the page, heart notes

in the margins. She had lived inside that Book.

When it was opened during that season of attack, a photograph fell out. It was a picture of the blueberry bushes — the very bushes growing on the property now under threat. That photograph had been tucked in as a bookmark years earlier and forgotten. God had placed a marker in that Bible before the attack ever came, waiting for the day it would be needed. The whisper was unmistakable: 'I was here before they arrived. This land is Mine. Your life is Mine. No threat changes My plan.' That moment changed something. The Thread had been there the whole time — quiet, steady, faithful. This book is the process of turning around and following it back.

The Thread is not discovered by looking forward. It is recognized by looking backward — over the battles, the silences, the moments of unexpected provision, the things that arrived at exactly the wrong time and turned out to be exactly right. If you are reading this and your life feels like a series of disconnected events with no organizing principle, that is the lie. God does not waste anything. Not the failure. Not the wound. Not the season that looked like He had stepped back. The Thread was running through all of it. Your job is to slow down long enough to see it.

- The Thread is not discovered by looking forward — it is recognized by looking backward over your battles, silences, and unexpected provisions.
- God placed markers in your story before you knew you would need them. The photograph in the Bible was there years before the attack came.
- The enemy intensifies when you move toward obedience — the pressure is not evidence of abandonment, it is evidence that something significant is happening.
- God does not waste anything — not the failure, not the wound, not the season that looked like He stepped back. The Thread was running through all of it.

"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written." — Psalm 139:16

1. Has there been a moment in your life where you looked back and recognized that God had been setting something up long before you could see it? Describe it as specifically as you can.
2. What is the 'photograph in the Bible' in your own story — the marker God placed that you only understood later, when the attack came and you needed it?
3. How have you responded in past seasons when the pressure increased as you moved toward obedience? Did you read that pressure as abandonment, or as confirmation?
4. What does it mean to you emotionally — not just theologically — to believe that God's plans for you are 'peace, and not evil'? Does it feel true right now?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take 10 minutes and trace your story backward from this moment. Where do you see the Thread? Where were you certain God was absent — and now wonder if you were wrong? Write what you see.

CHAPTERS 1-3

Foundations / The Ache / When the Thread Makes Sense

Theme: You were not made for what the world is offering you. The disruption may be the direction.

READ FIRST — Open your Bible to these passages before continuing.

Genesis 1:26-27

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him."

Identity begins here — before your parents named you, before the world labeled you, before your failures shaped you. You were spoken into existence as an image-bearer. That declaration stands regardless of everything that came after.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

God set eternity — *olam* in Hebrew — in the human heart. This is why no earthly achievement fully satisfies. The ache is not a malfunction. It is the echo of what you were made for, calling you home.

Romans 8:28

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The disruption that shattered your plan may be the route God was always taking. Joseph's pit was not an interruption of God's plan — it was the plan. The Thread runs through the hard chapters, not around them.

THE TEACHING

Identity begins in God, not in achievement, failure, or other people's definitions. This is not just theology — it is the most practically important truth a man can know, because it determines where he goes looking for himself. If identity begins in God, then no achievement can give it to you and no failure can take it away. If it begins in the world's definitions, then you are only as valuable as your last performance, only as secure as the last thing the culture approved of, only as whole as other people's opinions of you. That is not freedom — that is a treadmill with no finish line.

The ache inside you is not a malfunction. It is evidence. In Ecclesiastes 3:11, Solomon writes that God set *olam* — eternity — in the human heart. Not a vague spiritual longing. Eternity itself. That is why no earthly thing fully satisfies. It was never designed to. The ache is not a problem to medicate away. It is the voice of God calling His sons home. It is the echo of Eden inside a human heart — the whisper that says you were made for more than this. The reason the enemy fights your time in Scripture so hard is that Scripture speaks directly into the ache. When you let God address the ache, you begin to wake up. You begin to rebuild.

Formation is what you repeatedly feed your mind — not what you decide once. If you live on the world's diet, you will speak with the world's voice. Scripture warned about this long before social media existed: 'Be not conformed to this world' (Romans 12:2). The word conformed means squeezed into a mold. The mold is always pressing. The only counter is deliberate, repeated exposure to truth — the same Word, over and over, until it becomes the thing you reach for instinctively when the pressure hits.

The disruption that looks like God abandoning your plan may be God protecting His. Joseph's brothers threw him in a pit. He ended up in Egypt. He ended up in prison. He ended up as second-in-command of the most powerful empire on earth, in the exact position needed to save his entire family — and the Thread — from famine. What looked like catastrophe was the route. Not the detour. The route. The question in every disruption is not 'Why is this happening to me?' The question is: 'What is the Thread doing?'

- Identity begins in God — which means no achievement can give it and no failure can take it. Any other starting point is a treadmill with no finish line.
- The ache is not a malfunction — God set eternity (*olam*) in the human heart. It was never going to be silenced by anything the world offers.
- Formation is what you repeatedly feed your mind, not what you decide once. The world's mold is always pressing. Deliberate, repeated truth is the only counter.
- The disruption may be the route, not the detour. Joseph's pit was not an interruption of God's plan — it was the plan.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." — Romans 8:28

1. What has the world trained you to believe about who you are — and where do you see that training show up in how you actually think and live?
2. What is the ache in your life that you have been most successful at running from? What feeds it? What actually — even briefly — addresses it?
3. Where have you confused God's silence with God's absence? Looking back, was He actually silent — or were you not yet in a position to understand what He was doing?
4. Name the most painful disruption of your life. Can you trace it forward to see what it prevented, what it produced, or what position it put you in that you couldn't have reached any other way?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Name the most painful interruption of your life. Trace it forward: what did it prevent? What did it produce? What do you see in it now that you couldn't have seen in the middle of it?

Prayer and next step

What will you put into practice before your next meeting? Who will you pray for?
