

America stands at a crossroads, and faces incredible challenges. The future is full of uncertainty. Have you ever wondered what you could do? The prayers of Scripture offer answers and hope. Embracing the truths and principles of those prayers, we can impact our world for good, and be history makers.

AT THE CROSSROADS OF IMAGINE WHAT IF: HOW THE PRAYERS OF THE PATRIARCHS, PROPHETS, AND KINGS CAN IMPACT YOUR LIFE AND OUR NATION FOR GOOD

by Lallah Brillhart

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At The Crossroads of



Lallah Brillhart

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UNLEASH YOUR IMAGINATION!

Genesis 1

Let's start at the very beginning...that's a very good place to start. So goes the song of the beloved musical *The Sound of Music*, as Maria taught the Von Trapp children to sing.

Great idea – but let's be honest, Maria did not really start at the very beginning. For **the** very beginning is found in a beautiful garden named Eden that was filled with the melodious songs of birds. Now **that** is a great place to start.

Beginning...the word itself prompts thoughts of newness. The Garden of Eden was a clean slate upon which God, the Creator of all things, could write His plan within the hearts of Adam and Eve. And so He did, as He walked daily with them in the splendor of this magnificent paradise.

Scripture gives us only glimpses into the times they spent together, and the conversations they shared. We truly don't know how long they shared this sweet communion. It might have been just a day; it might have been hundreds of years. But it's fun to imagine all the possibilities wrapped up in the creation story.

God has given us the incredible gift of imagination. Engaging this gift as we read the Scripture can cause its stories to come to life. Imagination can help us enter into a scene that might otherwise seem distant and irrelevant. Releasing our imagination can help us relate more personally to the principles of the Word. It can enable us to have a deeper and clearer understanding of its many truths.

When we unleash our imagination in this manner, there is a need for caution. What we imagine as we read Scripture is

never as important or valid as the written Word of God itself. Although it may help us to explore more deeply, or develop a scenario more fully, it never surpasses Scripture. We always need to discern the difference between our imagination and God's actual Word. If what we imagine does not line up with Scripture, or takes us on a path that challenges the Word, let there be no question as to which has to go. The Word of God endures above all things forever.

Giving our imagination freedom to intersect the Scripture cannot be a hurried process. It is a matter of pondering, questioning, and allowing our senses to experience the stories and scenes. We must be able to slow our world and our minds down, quiet ourselves, and connect with the words we are reading. We must give the Holy Spirit permission, time, and space to ignite our imagination.

For example, envision with me the day God presented Adam with each of the animals to be named. Can you conceive the depth of amazement he must have experienced as he beheld God's creativity expressed in each one? Can you picture him rolling on the ground in laughter as he watched the long-legged and long-necked giraffe figure out how to get a drink of water? Can you picture him scratching his head in confusion as the tortoise played "now you see me, now you don't?" Do you suppose he was amused by the waddle of the duck-billed platypus? Do you think Adam got his first shower when the elephant let loose a trunk full of water in his direction? Can you hear the chuckles from the depth of his belly as mischievous monkeys chased one another from tree to tree? Can you sense the awe that overwhelmed him as he stroked the mane of the majestic lion? Can you imagine the tenderness that flooded his heart as he nuzzled his face in the soft wool of the lamb? Can you picture the sheer delight on the face of God as he watched Adam's amazement at each creature?

That was fun, wasn't it? What a day that must have been! Releasing our imagination can be exciting, amusing, and joyful. It can also be challenging, inspiring, adventuresome, and convicting. Imagination is a wondrous gift given to man and man alone.

God chose to make mankind in His image. Although all creation reflects His glory,¹ we are the only created beings who are assigned to reflect His character. The word "imagination" begins with the word image. By its very definition imagination enables us to be creative. Therefore, the gift of imagination enables us to reflect God's creative character.

When we deny or squelch the expression of our imagination, we essentially limit our ability to reflect God's character. We also hinder our ability to wonder and create. *When we do not give our imaginations permission to impact God's Word, we can hinder the Word's impact on us.* Sadly, at times we allow Holy Spirit inspired passages to remain just black words on a white page; or we allow God-breathed messages to be nothing more than stories from long ago. Lord, forgive us.

Yet when we unleash our imaginations to delve deeply into what is being said; when we envision the scenes and apply our senses to the pages of Scripture, suddenly those very same black and white words explode with life-giving power.

Have you ever pictured the scene when a donkey spoke to Balaam?² What must that have looked like? I would love to have been hiding somewhere in the bushes to witness that one. I think it's one of the most hysterical passages in Scripture; the thought of it makes me laugh!

Have you ever listened to the waves clapping (yes, clapping, not lapping) against the shore as Jesus walked by?

Have you ever listened for the belly laugh Jesus might have had to suppress as he watched Zacchaeus climb that tree? (I hope you don't think it irreverent that Jesus would laugh heartily. Maybe that was the beginning of holy laughter.) Have you slowly breathed in the fragrance of the perfume poured out on Jesus' feet as Mary prepared His body for burial? Or have you smelled the stench of those whose bodies were eaten away with leprosy?

Have you ever allowed yourself to connect with the emotions of people in Scripture? Have you ever imagined the intensity and complexity of their various feelings? Can you put yourself in the place of the priests when the Shekinah glory of God descended upon Solomon's temple? Can you imagine the breath-taking awe that fell so heavily upon them that they could not stand or minister? Have you allowed the ecstatic joy of women whose sons were returned to them from death, well up in you? Or have you felt the utter heart wrenching anguish of the women whose baby boys were ripped from their nurturing arms to be run through with a sword before their very eyes?

Have you felt the confusion and fear of the disciples that dark and evil night when Roman soldiers arrested their Master? Have you heard the uncontrollable sobs of the women who stood at the foot of the cross? Can we even begin to imagine the intense emotions the disciples experienced when they beheld the beaten and bloodied body of the One they loved so dearly? Can we imagine their depth of despair and hopelessness as they laid Him in a cold and dark tomb? And then...and then...is it possible to feel their confusion mixed with ecstasy and exhilaration, as He stood upright before them in His glorious resurrected body?

We could go on and on. Actually, I would love to. I will leave that up to you, dear reader, as you turn the pages of your

own Bible. I wish we could talk about each and every story; each and every teaching. I pray as you take in the daily bread He has given us that it will not be just a meal, but a magnificent feast, prepared by the Master Chef Himself. Each and every word of Scripture is power-packed and life-inspiring.

So much said; so much unsaid. So much only hinted at. So much I want to know. So many questions I have. So much left open to our imagination.

Imagination is the key to possibilities. Remember, imagination is a gift given by God to man, and man alone. There is an integral connection between this gift of imagination and **what if**. As we allow our imagination to intersect with **what is**, we unlock the door to **what if**. When we walk through that door of **what if**, a whole new realm is opened up to us. When we apply **what if**, we realize things do not need to remain as they are. Scripture says God called things that were not as though they were.³ The intersection of our imagination and **what if** unleashes the possibilities of what could be. It opens the door from what we see with our physical eyes in the physical realm, to what might be seen with our spiritual eyes in the spiritual realm. **What if** encourages us to move beyond the everyday normal, the status quo, the mundane, the ordinary, and the common. **What if** challenges us to pursue the extraordinary, the remarkable, and the excellent. **What if** stimulates our thinking to consider things beyond our norm. **What if** stirs our faith to believe in and trust for miracles. **What if** inspires us to be history changers and history makers. **What if** emboldens us to contend for the supernatural.

That is the journey on which we are about to embark as we travel through the pages of the Holy Scripture and look at individuals who dared to contend for **what if**. They were just like us, but they dared to believe that their actions and their

prayers could turn the tide of history, could impact the future, and could bring about a different and unexpected result.

I believe that is what we desperately need at this hour in history. I believe God is looking for men and women who will courageously and boldly, earnestly and persistently, contend for **what if**. I believe He is looking for those who will not settle for the status quo, who are not satisfied with the ordinary nor the normal, who will not succumb to a standard of living that is beneath what God ordained for those who were created in His image. I believe He is looking for men and women, young and old, who will declare the truth of God among our generation. I believe His eye is searching for those who will proclaim the power and possibilities of the Almighty during this crossroad in history.

If that is the cry of your heart, then I invite you to join me on this journey. Are your bags packed? You won't need much - just your Bible, a hungry heart, and a wide open imagination into which God can pour secret delights.

*Father, thank You for creating us in your image. Thank You for the beauty of this world that You created for our pleasure. Thank You for the gift of imagination. Would You cause that gift to burst forth within each one of us, so that we may perceive with greater clarity the world around us? Especially when we read Your Word, Lord, let our imaginations flow and bring life to what is written. Cause our imaginations to expand our understanding and help us to see the possibilities that are there. Let our imaginations intersect the **what is**, and fill us with the **what if**. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Assess your imagination. On a scale of one to ten, (one being the least and ten being the greatest) where would you measure the use of your imagination?

2. What have been the factors in your life that have either encouraged or discouraged the use of your imagination?

3. How would you define the “**what if**” factor?

4. Select a story in the Bible. It can be either in the Old or New Testament. First, read through the passage in its entirety. Then read it several times again, allowing yourself to envision the sights around, smell the odors or fragrances, perhaps feel the wind or water, or whatever may be tactile, and listen for the sounds that might be there. Some stories even allow our taste to come into play, like the changing of water into wine or the feeding of the five thousand. Try to identify with the emotions of the people who are in the story. Imagine their reactions and inner thoughts. Record below what you imagined. Did the story take on deeper meaning for you? Did this help you identify with the characters in the story better? Did you grasp some principles that you may not have before? Do you think this will help you remember the story better?

2

FROM THE CALL TO THE FALL

Genesis 1-3

As we begin our journey, let's go back and find Adam and Eve where we left them in the Garden of Eden. Observing them, we might feel slightly overdressed.

Take a moment to look around the Garden. Drink in its resplendent beauty, vibrant with color. Breathe in the sweet fragrances of exotic flowers. Listen to the joyful yet soothing music of nature. Feel the warmth of the sun as it wraps you in a blanket of perfect temperature and comfort. See its rays of light glisten and dance on the water. Be amazed as you watch the lion and the lamb, the deer and the tiger, and the bear and the kitten romp and play together. Is it not the most magnificent and glorious setting you have ever seen?... Selah.

These things are easy to imagine because most of us have been exposed to all of them to some degree. And even if we have not personally encountered a lion or a bear, National Geographic Magazine and the world of technology have certainly allowed us to experience them vicariously.

But there is something in the Garden that is foreign to us. It is something more difficult for us to imagine. It is something nearly impossible for our finite minds to grasp. It is the absence of sin and the inescapable presence of purity, innocence, safety and all-encompassing peace.

Have you ever lived a day, or even an hour, in this world that was totally – and I mean totally – free from sin? I have not. Whether that sin is within the depths of my own heart, a mess of my own making, the sin of someone close to me, or the sin of mankind in general, I have never experienced an extended period of time when life has not been tainted in some way by

the ravages of sin. The closest I can personally identify with the innocence and purity of Eden is in those brief but heavenly moments when I am fully surrendered at the foot of the cross, or when I have gone “beyond the veil” into the Holy of Holies and am wrapped in the glory of God’s Presence. I would love to live there. But to be honest, I don’t; and I can’t. That is a mistake of my own making.

Genesis 2:25 says of Adam and Eve, “*they were naked and unashamed.*” It is the last description of them before that fateful day when they yielded to the cunning trickery of the enemy. Unashamed is the only emotion Scripture says they had. We can imagine or presume they felt others, such as joy, love, and peace. But the Word of God simply tells us they were unashamed.

Shamelessness. Pause a moment and ponder that word and all it suggests. No shame - no shame about anything. It is profound. I have never encountered someone who did not have something in their life about which they did not experience shame. Shamelessness means there was **nothing** –absolutely **nothing** - with which they were burdened. There was **no thing** that oppressed them under the unbearable weight of shame. No shame means there was no disobedience, no pride, no jealousy, no fear, no anger, no competition, no malice, no rebellion, no arrogance, no suppression, no lying, no deception, no doubt, no anxiety, no hatred, no hidden motive, no wrong choices, no negativity, no failures, no mistakes – **NO SIN.**

I think you get the picture. We could fill the page with all the things with which we struggle on a daily basis, but were absent from the Garden where Adam and Eve resided. None of those things were there in the slightest measure.

Hard to imagine, isn’t it?

What was there in abundance was joy unspeakable, love abounding, peace beyond understanding, patience without

boundaries, selflessness of heart, mutual submission, devoted obedience, complete shamelessness, and the Presence of the Almighty. Sounds like a place I would not only like to visit; I would like to live there. How about you?

Forgiveness, mercy, and grace were not even needed. They were being reserved for a future time.

Until that fateful day.

In the midst of all this bliss and goodness of the Garden, God daily walked and talked with Adam and Eve. During this time Jehovah God, Elohim, shared His heart with them. He poured out His love upon them. He shared His vision for things to come. He instructed them in His ways. He invited them to partner with Him in the rule and reign of His magnificent creation. To none of the other creatures did He extend this invitation.

God blessed Adam and Eve and He said to them, *“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*⁴

Did you catch the words *rule and subdue*? The King James Version of the Bible uses the phrase *“have dominion over.”* In essence, God was deputizing Adam and Eve to have power and authority over the entirety of His creation on Earth.

One might think, “Seriously God? Seriously? That is a huge responsibility! Have you thought this through? Do you seriously think it’s a good idea?” Adam and Eve were still wet behind the ears. The mud from which Adam had been formed was hardly dry yet. The opening in his side from which Eve was fashioned could not possibly have been completely healed! They had no experience, much less a resume that would qualify them for such leadership responsibility. Wouldn’t one of the

angels have been better suited for such a mammoth undertaking?

Yet God, in His glorious omniscience, chose to promote Adam and Eve to the position. He placed the future of planet Earth in the hands of these two novices. Truth is, they were far more suited than even the highest angels, for the Spirit of God Himself had been breathed into them at their creation. It was that Spirit from which they would rule.

Have you ever known of a man or woman who passed on to their son(s) or daughter(s) something they had devoted their lifetime to build and develop? The transference is typically not something haphazard or impulsive. The process is usually accompanied by much thought, introspection, evaluation, consideration and preparation. On the one hand, it is a time of celebration, as the parent rejoices in anticipation of their children's future success. On the other hand, it can also be a time of painful separation, as they relinquish something into which they have invested so much of their time, talents, energies, finances, and even their identity. That separation might be laced with apprehension. There are no guarantees of how the child(ren) will maintain or continue the legacy. There are no assurances that the heir(s) will value, appreciate, or honor the gift that is given to them. No matter how much instruction, mentoring, or coaching they have been given ahead of time, future success will lay solely in their hands. There are no guarantees that the recipients will fulfill the plans, purposes, or aspirations of their parent.

I wonder if it was like that for God. As he surveyed His creation, perfect in every aspect, I wonder what He must have felt when He placed it in the hands of these two apprentices. Unlike the earthly parent, however, God had complete foreknowledge of what they would do.

But God is sovereign. Despite what we may think through the advantage of hindsight, the decision was fully God's to make. For a period of time all went exceedingly well in the Garden of Eden.

Until that fateful day.

Until that fateful day that literally turned the world upside down and inside out for every living creature; not only for those alive at the time, but for all those who would follow through the ages.

Until that fateful day of wrenching, tearing, and upheaval, when all that was perfect became distorted into something imperfect, unfamiliar, and so undesirable.

Until that fateful day, when those who knew no shame were covered with it from head to toe.

How do we know they went from shamelessness to shame in the blink of an eye? The first thing they did was hide. That's what shame does – it causes us to hide. It causes us to separate. It causes us to cover ourselves, hoping no one will know, no one will notice, and no one will suspect. Shame drives a wedge in our relationship with God and one another. It imprisons us with chains of embarrassment, humiliation, and disgrace.

On that fateful day, shamelessness departed, and shame invaded the heart of man.

On that fateful day, all the angels of God were gathered at the precipice of heaven, witnessing the scene taking place below, where Eve and the serpent were front and center.

Can you picture with me the angels jerking fully to alert as they heard the first word come forth from the serpent as he enticed Eve? The angels of Heaven were eerily familiar with this voice. It was the voice of the one who had once enjoyed the magnificence of Heaven with them.⁵ It was the voice of the one who had rebelled when he tried to exalt himself above their

Master. It was the voice of the one who had cunningly incited a third of the angels to side with him in the rebellion against the Almighty.⁶ Oh yes, they knew this voice all too well. They knew of what he was capable. Can you see them positioning themselves, poised to intervene and protect God's prized creation the instant He gave the command? Waiting... waiting...waiting...surely He would send them forth! Surely they could dispel this evil one with one lethal blow!

Can you hear the resounding “Nooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” that reverberated throughout the heavenly realm as Eve took hold of the fruit, raised it to her lips, and sunk her teeth into its pulp? Can you hear the horrendous thud that shook them to their core at the falling of Adam and Eve from their position of dominion to their new place of slavery? Can you hear the clanking of invisible chains of bondage being wrapped around them? Can you detect their exhaling breath as the Spirit of the Living God exited their being?

In an instant everything...*everything*...changed.

It is easy for us to play “Monday morning quarterback” as we view the scene from afar. If we could rewrite this pivotal portion of Scripture, I wonder what it might look like. If only we had been consulted during the original planning we might have offered a number of plausible options. If we had been consulted we might have suggested to God that turning the control over to Adam and Eve might not be such a good idea. We might have presented the Creator with a list of alternatives, a list of substitute possibilities, or a list of **what ifs**. Maybe there could be a do-over.

What if God never created the serpent? **What if** He had totally eliminated Satan when he rebelled in Heaven? **What if** God had orchestrated the scenario so that the serpent never had

access to those created in His image? Surely he could have done that.

What if God had prevented evil from entering the serpent, or any other creature, in the first place? Surely God could have done that.

Yes, surely he could have. But if He had, Adam and Eve would have never been presented with a **choice**. They would have never known free will. They would have been mere puppets. Their love, devotion, obedience, and worship would have never been tested. *Love that is void of the option to choose, is not love at all.* It is merely a programmed response. God desired those created in His image to love Him because they wanted to, not because they had to. Jesus told his disciples the night He was betrayed, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”*⁷ Obedience speaks love to God. It is one of the primary languages through which He receives love from us. The ultimate lover of our souls desires that we express our love for Him through obedience to His commands and a desire for Him above all else.

What if God had given the command for the angels to swoop down and rescue Eve, the damsel in distress? **What if** they had been given the go ahead to crush the serpent, rendering him and his insidious scheme powerless? **What if** the angelic army of God had been given permission to evict Satan from the Garden?

Surely God could have sent forth that command, and that day would have been saved. But again, doing so would have eliminated the free will God had gifted to Adam and Eve. Had the angels rescued them that day, they would already have abdicated their right to rule and have dominion.

What if Adam had been by Eve’s side to step in and be her superhero? Where was he, anyway? We often, perhaps

jokingly, assume that Adam had wandered off somewhere. We often conclude he was not where he was supposed to be and not fulfilling his role as her protector. **What if** Adam was not the one who had wandered off? **What if** it were Eve? **What if** she had been lured away by the cunning tactics of the serpent? **What if** she was not where she was supposed to be? Have you ever noticed how much more susceptible we are to temptation when we are by ourselves, or in the wrong places? Have you ever noticed that the enemy has a way of isolating us while he makes sin so enticing and appealing?

What if Adam and Eve had been together when the serpent addressed Eve? Would they have been a united force that could have resisted the temptation? Perhaps. Would they have reminded one another of God's goodness and instruction? Perhaps.

But then the concept of personal choice and personal responsibility with God would not have been presented. None of us can have a relationship with God through someone else. No one can make the decision to serve and obey God for someone else. We all know there are many times we would like to. How many spouses yearn to make the choice for their husband or wife? How many parents grieve when they see their children walking a path contrary to God's ways? How many parents want, and even try, to redirect the path their adult children have chosen?

Yet from the beginning, God has determined that following Him must be a personal decision. The closeness of one's walk with Him is a personal decision. Adam could not make it for Eve, and Eve could not make it for Adam. God would not honor or permit that. Eve had to make it for herself. Adam had to make it for himself. You and I have to make it for ourselves. Our spouse, our children, and our loved ones have to

make it for themselves. We can coerce and manipulate all we want, but it is to no avail.

Perhaps it was not a coincidence that Adam and Eve were not together at this particular moment. Perhaps God had arranged it that way so that they were each confronted with the choice on their own. Perhaps this was a crossroads they had to face alone.

What if the serpent had gone to Adam before Eve? Surely Adam would have resisted...wouldn't he?

Maybe. We will never know for sure, at least not on this side of eternity. But if so, then Adam would not have been presented with the dilemma of whom he desired to please the most – his God, or his beautiful bride. He would not have been confronted with the choice of whom he would listen to, and by whom he would be led – His Maker, or the one He had made? He would not have had to choose whom he would trust – his Creator, or the created.

What if they had remembered that God had forbidden them to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge?

They did. Eve even reminded the serpent of that significant fact. Somewhere in the conversation, that fact became distorted and lost its significance.

Consider something with me for a moment. This is a place we might give wings to our imagination. Was there a reason Eve would have realized this voice speaking to her was dangerous? Up to this point she had never encountered danger or evil. Up to this point danger was not a possibility or reality to her. Perhaps in Eve's thinking evil was not on her radar screen.

Up to this point all she had known was good, for everything in the Garden had been created by God and everything God created was good. God had created the serpent. Perhaps in Eve's thinking the serpent was therefore good.

Perhaps she had engaged in conversations with the serpent in the past. I imagine Adam and Eve were able to converse with all the animals.

Scripture tells us two things about the serpent: he was a wise and cunning creature, and he was relegated to crawl on his belly after the Fall. Being wise and cunning, perhaps at one time the serpent was a good and interesting communicator. Perhaps Eve and the serpent were accustomed to sharing enjoyable conversations. Perhaps Eve was in the habit of discussing life in the Garden with the serpent. Perhaps at one time the serpent stood upright and was a magnificent creature. If he did stand upright, and most of the other creatures did not, perhaps Eve saw the serpent as being more comparable to Adam and Eve.

This is all speculation of course, but it is possible. If so, then perhaps Eve had no reason to question the serpent's motives. Perhaps her defense mechanisms were down; or more accurately, perhaps they weren't there at all because she didn't know she needed them. Perhaps she couldn't fathom anyone doing something contrary to God's command.

The enemy saw her vulnerability. He saw her innocence and took full advantage. He entered one that had access to her trust. He used the vessel of the serpent as his mouthpiece to deceive, to deliver his sinister plan, and to strike a deadly blow.

Eve was totally caught off guard; she was blindsided. Perhaps she didn't discern that the spirit of God's arch enemy had inhabited the serpent. Perhaps she didn't realize the voice was the voice of evil.

Isn't that how the enemy works in all our lives? He watches for our vulnerabilities, then he ever so slyly slips his deception into our hearts and minds. Sometimes he uses things or people with which we are familiar, and he confuses us with his crafty trickery. He makes his temptations seem logical,

harmless, or innocuous. He slowly and cunningly leads us astray, while all the time poisoning us with deceptive and empty promises. Often we are not even aware until it's too late. So it was with Eve on that fateful day.

What if – just **what if** Adam and Eve had remembered the mandate? **What if** the words *rule and reign* had rung loudly in their ears? **What if** Eve had trusted in her God given authority over all creatures? **What if** she had remembered that the serpent was merely a created creature over which she had been instructed to rule? **What if** she remembered she, not the serpent, had been created in God's image? **What if** she had not engaged in conversation with him, but had remembered she was called to tell the serpent what to do, and not the other way around? **What if** she had stood in the position of authority that was rightfully hers? **What if** she had acted in that authority? **What if** she had used her authority to silence this one who dared to question her God? **What if** Adam and Eve had embraced their God-given identity as an extension of Him on planet Earth? **What if** they had walked in that identity as His authoritative representatives?

What if? Then Adam and Eve would have walked in victory; at least for that moment. But somewhere along the line there would have been a fateful succumbing to the temptation of the enemy. There had to be. The gift of choice and free will opened the door for that. But that gift opened the door to another gift – the most incredible gift – the gift of a Savior. Before God began creation He knew sin would enter the picture someday. He already had in place a plan to reverse the mess we would make.

That plan had a Name – it was Immanuel, God with us, Jesus. In the fullness of time He would be sent to be like us and dwell among us. In the fullness of time God Himself would clothe Himself in our flesh. He would be nailed to a cross on a

hill named Calvary where the full measure of our punishment would be unleashed upon Him. As His bloodied, beaten, distorted-beyond-recognition body would hang on that cross, every act of disobedience from that fateful day in the Garden to the end of times would be laid entirely upon Him. He would bear the stripes for our healing. He would take the shame for our transgressions. He would pay the price – in full. Forgiveness would flow in a stream of red that soaked into the dirt from which Adam was formed. And the greatest expression of amazing love and amazing grace ever imagined would be forever extended to all mankind.

Jesus died upon that cross. But God's plan of redemption was not finished at the cross. For after three days, His bloodless body rose from the dead. His resurrected body remained on earth for forty more days, during which He continued to teach His disciples. Then He ascended to Heaven where He lives forevermore. And then He sent the Holy Spirit to live within His followers.

The Spirit of God had departed from Adam and Eve that fateful day in the Garden when they obeyed the words of Satan over the Word of their God. Since that day the Spirit of God dwelt *with* man, but had never lived *within* man. Since that day man could witness the power of God, but the power of God did not inhabit man. Since that day, man lost the power and authority given to him through God's mandate.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out following Christ's ascension, it was a new day. It was not a fateful day; it was a marvelous day.

On that marvelous day, the Holy Spirit of God came to live *within* man.

On that marvelous day, the Holy Spirit of God was sent to indwell man.

On that marvelous day, the power and authority lost in the Garden was restored to man.

That day was a day of reversal, not just for those alive at that time, but for all who would follow throughout the ages. **What if** we live our lives as though the Holy Spirit lives within us? **What if** we remember and rehearse the mandate given us? **What if** we recognize the power and authority that is available to us? **What if** we realize that greater is He Who is in us than he who is in the world?⁸ **What if** we use that authority to push back the gates of Hell?⁹ **What if** we operate in that authority to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth?

It was not God's plan that the angels, mighty and majestic as they were, would rescue Adam and Eve that day. It was His original plan that the rescue and deliverance be carried out one day in the future by the second Adam – Jesus the Christ.¹⁰ His plan of redemption included not only the forgiveness of our sins, but the shattering of our bondages, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning, God had a superior plan, and an eternal plan. The sin of Adam and Eve could not and did not nullify it. Even though God had told them they would die on the day they ate of the tree of knowledge, the story was not over. Thank God; the story was not over.

Lallah Brillhart

Father, thank You for Your plan of salvation. Thank You for not giving up on mankind. Thank You for not abandoning us. Thank You for sending Jesus. Thank You for the forgiveness that came through His work on the cross. Thank You that He rose from the dead and conquered death. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit. Thank You for being the restorer of all things. Thank You for the hope we have in You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Do you have any new or fresh insights regarding the Creation story?

2. Think back through your life. How did you deal with issues that caused you shame? How did shame make you feel? What did it cause you to do?

3. Do you have an assurance in your heart that you have received Christ as your personal Savior?

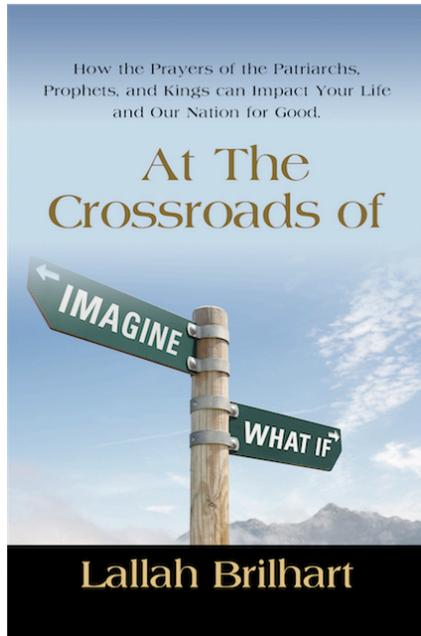
If not, you can have that assurance now. Acknowledge that God is sovereign. Take some time to thank Him for His plan of salvation. Confess your sins to Jesus and receive His forgiveness. Surrender your life to Him and give Him permission to take control. Invite Jesus into your heart, spirit, and life to be your Savior and Lord.

If you have prayed that prayer for the first time, congratulations! You have just made the most important decision of your life! It is vital for you to grow in your walk with the Lord. Just as a newborn baby needs to be fed, so our newly born spirits need to be fed. God has given us His Word as that food. Get a translation of the Bible that is easy for you to understand. Feed on His food everyday so that it nourishes your spirit and soul. Prayer, worship, and fellowship with other believers are also essential aspects of our growth. I am praying even now that you will find a group of believers with whom you can grow in your new life.

Welcome to the family of God my new brother or sister!

4. What is your understanding of the power and authority we have been given through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit?

5. What three **what ifs** speak to you the most? Would you add any?



America stands at a crossroads, and faces incredible challenges. The future is full of uncertainty. Have you ever wondered what you could do? The prayers of Scripture offer answers and hope. Embracing the truths and principles of those prayers, we can impact our world for good, and be history makers.

AT THE CROSSROADS OF IMAGINE WHAT IF: HOW THE PRAYERS OF THE PATRIARCHS, PROPHETS, AND KINGS CAN IMPACT YOUR LIFE AND OUR NATION FOR GOOD

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