

My wife and I have always had a fascination with quilts and if we are in a place where quilts are made or sold, more often than not we will make an effort to go look at the display racks and admire their beauty.

For us, a quilt is not only a thing beauty but also served a very specific purpose and was an everyday fixture in our homes when we were growing up. Today, we typically purchase one to hang on a wall as a display but this has not always been the case or the use by our families for these wonderful bed coverings.

Both my mother and Ruth Anne's mother made quilts for our family to use as bed coverings and those quilts were what kept us warm on the cold Missouri winter nights.

Both women utilized both scrap material and new material in constructing these quilts and the patterns used were carefully considered and the construction of a quilt might take a very long time with the unfinished product in storage for long periods of time before the final product was complete. Each piece utilized in the patterns had a definite place in that pattern and told a little of the overall story of the quilt.

Look at any particular piece and it might have been from material from a favorite dress that outlived its usefulness or maybe it would be from a shirt that dad had spilled something on ruining it for use as a dress shirt but leaving lots of wonderful material to use as one of the palettes of color for the quilt.

Because of the careful selection and knitting together of those pieces, either of our mothers could tell you a rich and wonderful story about each one of those quilts.

A few years ago our son turned forty years old and his good friend Kevin planned a surprise birthday party for him in Martinsburg, PA. My wife and Kevin did the party planning and they selected the party favors, decorations, food, cake, and all the basic things needed to set things up for the party.

As for me, I was asked to write a few stories from Jeff's childhood to share with everyone at the party. I was thrilled to do that because I had so many wonderful stories to write about. It seemed to be a pretty simple thing to do at first as I began writing the stories.

As I was writing up the stories of Jeff, I couldn't help thinking – and I do mean really thinking – about those stories, the passage of life, and about how our baby was turning forty years old.

And even though I had completed those stories to share with everyone, I felt that something vital was missing from the whole thing; something was needed in order to tie it all together.

And as I was sitting on the couch thinking about the stories that I had just written, my eyes drifted over to a quilt our son had given Ruth Anne for Christmas one year and that we now have hanging in our family room and I realized at that moment that I now knew how to knit all those stories together into a complete package.

It occurred to me that the story of our lives are very much like that quilt and I used that thought to create the one final story to share with everyone.

I use this example because every deed that we have ever done in our life is another story of our life and every story of our life is another piece in that overall “quilt” that we call life.

In the end, that overall “quilt” is the representative story of each of us, and when hung on a rack for God to see, He sees all of it. Every piece of the “quilt” will be known to God – very much like every piece that went into the quilts our mothers made was known to them when they looked at the quilts that they had made.

And very much like our mothers, we get to choose the pieces – or stories – that make up our lives by the choices that we make as we live our lives.

Here is the piece – or story – of the time I helped an aging Mr. & Mrs. Swanson by packing in enough wood for them to make it through the week without them having to get out in the thigh-deep snow in the backwoods of the Missouri Ozarks.

Over here is another piece where we went to a brother’s house in California so I could help him shave because he didn’t have the strength to do it by himself.

Down there is a different piece of a time when I provided transportation for a brother who needed help getting from our home town to his daughters home in St Louis County so he could get the cancer treatments for prostate cancer that he needed.

And over there is the piece where I was super critical of my sister and her lifestyle and in doing so managed to push her away probably forever.

There are all too many pieces in my “quilt” where I was not so nice to someone and my actions caused them hurt or harm.

In fact, if looked at on an open display rack, my “quilt” would not as pretty as the one hanging on the store display racks because there are all those pieces that are tarnished and torn by the bad choices that I’ve made.

To people who really love us, our “quilt” will look beautiful and they will in all likelihood not be able to see all the bad pieces that inhabit the quilt even though those pieces are clearly there.

To the world, they will see every piece of a public nature that stains our quilt and they will never see anything else but a quilt that is stained and moth eaten.

To ourselves, we probably see the stained and ragged pieces best of all humans because we know a lot more of the bigger picture and the hidden things of the heart that have tarnished us.

God sees even further and He sees those pieces that we ourselves won’t – or can’t - even admit exist.

He sees our individual “quilts” as they really are.

And we all know that those tarnished and ragged pieces in our “quilt” are in reality the result of sin in our lives. And as the sinners we are, God cannot tolerate sin and eventually we will be called to account for those sins someday.

Eccl 12:13 *The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. (14) For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. [NASB]*

So what to do?

Those with any type of spiritual conscience but no training in the bible will eventually begin to notice that something is missing in their lives because their “quilt” is stained and tarnished. They may not be able to put their finger on just what it is that is bothering them. They just know that they are not happy with their lives and they may end up searching in some very bad places and doing some very bad things in an attempt to be happy.

If we're fortunate enough to have someone who can teach us about God and Jesus; Jesus' life, His teachings, and what Jesus did for us on the cross, then we can begin to see what we need to do.

If we have someone who loves us, they will begin that story at – where else – the beginning. They will tell us of a God who is eternal; who is omnipotent; who loved enough to create the whole of the universe that we now presently inhabit; who loved enough to populate the earth with life culminating with the creation of man made in God's own image and to give man dominion over the earth and all that inhabits it. God looked at everything He created and found it to be very good. And that he did all that in six days and rested on the seventh. (Genesis 1 – 2)

If we have someone teach us who loves us, they will continue the story and the journey to understanding of what God desires for us all and will share with us the first sin of all, instigated by Satan when he enticed the woman - freely joined by her husband - to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They will teach us of the very first prophecy of how the great deceiver will eventually be brought down by the seed of man. They will teach us that lesson because of God's Holy nature and how a Holy God cannot be in proximity to sin and the story will show us the penalty paid for that initial sin in the banishment of man from the garden and the exclusion from the tree of life. (Genesis 3)

Our teacher will help us understand that God knew that man would eventually sin because man was created with the freedom to make choices. Man is - of all creatures that God created - the one creation with the creative power to imagine what could be; what might be. If not controlled, that creative power to imagine what could be and what might be coupled with the necessary desires instilled in each of us to reproduce and the very idea of self that tells us that “we are” and that “we can” when it comes to making choices can take us on paths that lead us away from God. Along with the creative power to imagine “what could be” and “what might be” God also gave us the power to love and love can overcome anything. His desire has from the first been that we will love Him enough to overcome the “we are” and the “we can” and can focus them into “we are His” and “we can glorify Him through our lives” and direct the “what could be” and “what might be” with confidence to the “what will be” as God rewards us and saves us from eternal destruction.

As our teacher helps us to understand these concepts, they will gently point out to us that not only is this first prophecy a prophecy that the seed of man will bring down the great deceiver but is also the first look of the beginnings of the plan of salvation for man to reconcile him to God.

Our teacher will continue the lesson and show us that the sinful nature of man does not stop in banishment from the garden, but will escalate in magnitude until the earth is filled with men of such wickedness that every intent of their hearts were bent on doing evil continually. They will tell us that the situation was so bad that God began to be sorry that He had made man and was ready to blot him completely off the face of the earth until one man named Noah found favor with God. (Gen 4-6)

God will follow through in destroying all life on the earth but will establish a covenant and spare this man and his family and only two of each living creature on earth to begin again. This man will be a righteous man and will follow God's commands and directions according to all that God directs him to do and will build an ark to carry them through the destruction of all life on earth. That man, his faith, and his story will be called upon later as an example of righteousness and a type of the salvation to come.

As our teacher continues in their lesson, they will begin showing us the common thread that permeates the bible from the earliest of times; that God has a plan for the redemption of man in the form of a savior to come and they will continue the lesson with a discussion of Abraham and Sarah and the promises made by God to Abraham: the promise of land, the promise of nationhood and the promise of the blessing of coming generations through his seed – the son of promise; the lineage of which will descend down to Jesus. (Gen 12ff)

Our teacher will help us to understand Abraham's great faith, as demonstrated in the story of the birth of Isaac and the in Abraham's trust in God when told to sacrifice his only son. They will show us the covenant of circumcision made between God and Abraham and his descendants as a sign of the promise of nationhood and inclusion as a chosen race for God. (Genesis 17)

As we explore the example of Abraham with our teacher, we will begin to understand that his "quilt" is more than a little tattered too. We will see what happens when we try to help God with the things that He needs no help with as in the example of Hagar and Ishmael and the child of promise. Or when we tell lies when we think are helping someone else or avoiding perceived danger as Abraham did in his and Sarah's journeys. Abraham was very much considered a righteous man but being forgiven of sin does not take away the consequences of that sin and some of those consequences of things Abraham and his wife did continue to this very day in the form of strife in the Middle East.

Our teacher will move on to a discussion of Abraham's grandson Jacob and will explore a dream (Genesis 28) that Jacob has while fleeing for his life from his brother Esau after he stole the birthright from his brother. This will be an unusual dream; one with a clear message and a more subtle message that will seem confusing to someone not familiar with the scriptures and the prophecies. The dream will be of a ladder (or stairway) between heaven and earth with God standing above the ladder and angels ascending and descending. God will repeat the promises he made previously to Abraham and Isaac - Jacob's father:

Gen 28:13 ... *“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. (14) Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. (15) Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”* [NASB]

The promises are straightforward but the symbology could be lost concerning the vision of the ladder between heaven and earth until the teacher shows that this is in reference to the coming savior who will bridge the gap between heaven and earth as chronicled in the New Testament:

John 1:49 *Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” (50) Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” (51) And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”* [NASB]

We will see the promises of nationhood and land repeated to Jacob and see his name officially changed to Israel at Bethel in Genesis 35:

Gen 35:9 *Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10 God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.”*

Thus He called him Israel. (11) God also said to him, “I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. (12) “The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.” [NASB]

As we continue our journey, we will talk about Jacob’s favorite son Joseph and the treachery of his brothers in plotting against him first to kill him and finally selling him into slavery ending up in Egypt. We see Joseph’s strength remaining strong in the Lord by resisting the advances of Potiphar’s wife and how he remains strong in his faith and flourishes, even in prison, finally interpreting Pharaoh’s dream as seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. For his interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream, Joseph is made next to Pharaoh in power and stature.

Joseph’s brothers eventually come to Egypt because the famine is severe in Canaan also and he eventually reconciles with them telling them that God had sent him to Egypt to preserve life – especially their lives by a great deliverance. And although his brothers meant evil against him, God meant it for good in order to bring this present result and to preserve many people alive. He brings the family to Egypt and settles them in Goshen where they become very prosperous.

At this point, our teacher will show us how Joseph was a “type” of Christ through comparison of the Old and New Testament writings of which there are many to compare but is probably best typified by the following verses:

Genesis 50:20-21 *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about [o]this present result, to preserve many people alive. (21) So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.*” [NASB]

John 3:16-17 *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* [NASB]

Our teacher will continue move on to the story of Moses who is himself another “type” of Christ. We will learn of the struggles of the Israelites in Egypt after they have been there a while when a Pharaoh rises who did not know Joseph and who becomes a cruel task master over them. We see the jealousy of the Egyptians in Exodus 1 because the Israelites were multiplying rapidly and were prospering more than the Egyptians. Eventually, Pharaoh orders the killing of all Hebrew male children in an attempt to control the Hebrew population and society.

We will see how Moses is born into this conflict and is taken in by Pharaoh’s daughter and was raised as her son. Moses never loses his connection to his people and eventually kills an Egyptian who is beating one of the Hebrews as they labor in slavery; that act forcing him into exile and hiding because Pharaoh is looking to kill him for his actions.

As the story of Moses and the Hebrew people unfolds, we will learn how God appears to him and selects him to be a leader for the Hebrew people to lead them out of Egypt and on a journey into the land of promise: “...*the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.*” (Ex 3:18)

Our teacher will lead us through the attempts by Moses to convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave as plague after plague is unleashed on the Egyptians - each one worse than the one before – culminating in the tenth plague of the death of the first born. We will see how God instructs the Hebrews how to be spared from this final plague by specific instructions on how to sacrifice, prepare and eat a perfect, unblemished lamb on a particularly defined night. The whole of Israel will partake of this ceremony on the same day at the very same time. If a family is too small to afford a lamb of its own, then families are to join to share a lamb. Some of the blood of the lamb is to be spread on the doorposts and lintels of the families because when the death angel comes to take the first born, families with the blood of the lamb on their doorposts and lintels will be spared and passed over by the angel.

We will see that God commands the Israelites to memorialize this event every year at the same time to remember the Passover and how they had been redeemed by God – that is, the price was paid - and spare the death of their first born by the blood of the Passover lamb.

Our teacher will take us on the journey – the Exodus – of the Hebrews from Egypt as Pharaoh finally lets them go at this last plague and we will see the story unfold as Pharaoh decides to renege and to pursue the Israelites as they leave. God has chosen that the journey of the Israelites will be a specific path, taking them through the wilderness to develop them and prepare them as a people and a nation. This journey will be a series of tests and lessons for the Hebrews to help them understand that it is God who is leading them; caring for them; feeding them. It is to show them their total dependence on God for everything to survive.

As such, the Israelites find themselves trapped between the approaching Egyptian army and the Red Sea and nowhere to flee. An angel of God has been guiding them in the form of a pillar of cloud that has been travelling before them and now that pillar moves around between them and the Egyptian army as a sign that God would protect them. Even so, some in the camp of the Israelites grumbled that their fate was sealed.

We see Moses do as the Lord commanded him, stretching out his hand over the sea, and we see the sea swept back by the Lord overnight by a strong east wind such that the land was dry and the Israelites crossed the sea bottom on dry land. We also see Moses doing as God commands and once again stretching out his hand over the sea after the Israelites had crossed and we see Pharaoh's whole army drowned in the returning waters.

Our teacher will journey with us through the story of the wanderings of the Israelites as they receive the law and as God provides for them in the wilderness. We will see their failings and we will see their faith. We will see them develop into the nation that God wants them to be with God at their head but it will be a hard road and take many years to get there. We will see them poised to go into the Promised Land but not yet quite ready to cross over because of unbelief and we will watch an entire generation die off before they finally have the faith and trust to make the journey.

Even their leader Moses and his spokesperson Aaron will have moments of weakness where they will not be fully vested in their trust and faith in God. One will result in the entire camp of Israel drinking a ground up golden calf and the other in one of them not being allowed by God to make that crossing into the Promised Land.

The people themselves will grumble continuously and stray from their faith and trust and will suffer many tribulations because of it including fiery serpents that bit and killed them for their grumbling and sin against God. In order to be saved from the serpents, God will have Moses make a bronze serpent, mount it on a standard, and tell the people that anyone who is bitten and looks at the bronze serpent will live.

Their collective "quilt" as a story of a nation will have a lot of frayed and tattered pieces in it before their journey is through but for the ones remaining faithful, it will be restored as new one day.

Our teacher will continue into the stories of the conquest of the promise land as the people are led into the new land and will tell of the missed opportunities to follow God's commands when the people don't heed what God tells them to do; the consequences of which continue with us to this very day.

The story of the birth of the new nation of Israel will continue as time after time the people get so embroiled in their own desires and of the Judges raised to correct that sin.

They will tell us of the prophets, the spiritual counselors sent by God in order to reveal the consequences of sin and the rewards of obedience for those who remain faithful to God. These prophets will tell the people of the eventual fall of the nation, the tribulations to come and the rescue of the remnant. By inspiration of God, they tell of the leaders and nations raised up

against the Israelites and of the ultimate fate of each in the predictions of those coming events – hundreds of years in advance and with bone-chilling accuracy.

And among all of the predictions and the warnings, among all of the physical elements of worship, sprinkled throughout the story of the Israelites, our teacher will show us the thread of the promise of a savior that will once and for all time reconcile man with God. That thread continues with some of the most prominent of those prophecies contained in the Psalms and Isaiah.

Just as God “passed over” the first born in Egypt because of the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels at the appearance of the death angel, this Savior will be the Lamb of God whose blood will forever cover our sins and save us from eternal punishment.

Isaiah 53:1 *Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (2) For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.*

(3) He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

(4) Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

(5) But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.

(6) All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

(7) He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.

(8) By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

(9) His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

(10) But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

(11) As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.

(12) Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.
[NASB]

At this point, we will undoubtedly ask our teacher why there was so much suffering? Why did God wait so long to bring the promised savior into the world if He knew he would be bringing one anyway?

Using the scriptures, our teacher will explain to us that it had to be this way in order to train the people in obedience of the things that are physical so they could begin to understand the concepts that are purely spiritual. One of the scriptures that they will use to illustrate this will be from Galatians.

Galatians 4:3 *So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. (4) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, (5) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (6) Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ["Abba! Father! is endearing term to say "daddy"] (7) Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. [NASB]*

Another question to our teacher will then be, "How do we know that Jesus is the one and what has the Savior done for us?" and our teacher once again use the scriptures to explain. They may start with John 1:

John 1:24 *Now they [priests and Levites] had been sent from the Pharisees. (25) They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (26) John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. (27) It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (28) These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

*(29) The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' (31) I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." (32) John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. (33) I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' (34) I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." [NASB]*

Our teacher will continue the story of Jesus and of His teachings culminating with the crucifixion. They will tie that event together with prophecies such as Isaiah that we just read and show how the prophecies are fulfilled.

They will continue with Ephesians 2:

Eph 2:1 *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (3) Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (6) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. [NASB]*

And:

Col 1:13 *For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

(15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (17) He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (18) He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (19) For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, (20) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

(21) And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— (23) if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven... [NASB]

Heb 8: 12 *"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." [NASB]*

One more question from the student may be why are all the other things in the bible, the things chronicling the worst of people? Why would God include those stories and events in the bible? And the teach will answer that God wants us to see all of ourselves: the good and the bad because each of them is a lesson in and of themselves whether we do good or we do bad. He

wants us to see the humanity of the people involved and why it was necessary for a Savior to come: no one could live perfectly by the law. He wants us to see the “quilt” of the people of the bible and maybe we can begin to understand the nature of our own “quilt.”

And, if the student has been moved in their heart, you already know what the next question will be: “How can I become that child of God, blameless in His sight?”

And the teacher will once again use the scriptures to show the student of the Way.

Once we are washed in the blood of Christ and continue to live faithful to Him, those stained and ragged pieces that corrupt our “quilt” will be repaired and the only thing that will be seen when we are in the presence of God as described in Ecclesiastes on the day of His judgment is that beautiful and perfect “quilt” that He always intended for us to be with all the pieces that we’ve corrupted complete, cleansed, repaired and in harmony, and a joy to His sight; reconciled to Him once and for all time by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

I guess the only thing left this morning to ask is, how is your quilt?