

Tattered Blankets - Introduction

The Tattered Blanket

I carry in my mind's eye an image I cannot shake: a blanket, once whole, now frayed and torn. Threads dangle where they've been pulled loose, threads of doctrine, fear, performance, conditions. Each thread clutched tightly by people who believe a single strand will keep them warm.

But a thread cannot cover you, a thread cannot comfort you, a thread cannot hold you through the night.

This book is about those threads. It is about the ways religion has unraveled the blanket of God's love into thin, fragile pieces. It is about the fear, grief, and anxiety that leave us grasping at what cannot sustain. And it is about the One who reweaves it all, not with our effort but with His own hands.

As a pastor and hospice chaplain I've seen too many people die clutching threads, wondering if they did enough, if they believed enough, if they belonged enough. Countless times I have whispered into their final moments: *"You are already loved. You are already covered. All this is from God."*

So come with me. Let us name the threads we've mistaken for the whole. Let us grieve the unraveling. And then, let us rest and celebrate under the blanket of love that was never lost, only forgotten.

From now on, we will regard no one from a worldly point of view. All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, not counting our sins against us. And He has given us this same ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:16,18-19)

This is the blanket; this is the gospel, all others are *"no gospel at all."*

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7)

Chapter 1 - The Thread of Conditions

The Image: A Frayed Thread Called “Unconditional Love”

I once heard someone say with conviction, *“God’s love is unconditional... but of course, there are conditions.”* I remember thinking, what a contradiction. It’s like telling a child, *“I will never stop loving you, but you must meet these requirements to stay loved.”* That isn’t unconditional; that’s bargaining.

This is what happens when we pull one thread out of the whole blanket of God’s love. We hold up the thread called “unconditional” while quietly knotting conditions onto it: If you repent the right way... if you’re baptized in the right denomination... if you follow the right creed... if you get your theology straight. In our hands, that one thread becomes a leash, a harness instead of a covering. It cannot warm us, cannot comfort us, cannot embrace us.

The Story: A Hospice Bedside

I sat once with a woman in her final days. Her voice was thin, but her worry was heavy. *“Chaplain,”* she whispered, *“I don’t know if I did enough. I hope I believed the right things. I hope I was good enough for Him to accept me.”*

In that moment, she wasn’t clutching the whole blanket of God’s love; she was clinging to a thread of conditions. Somewhere along her journey she had been taught that God’s love was fragile, that one misstep, one wrong decision, one incomplete act might leave her outside.

I took her hand and said softly, *“You don’t have to wonder if you’ve done enough. The truth is, He did it all.”* I quoted Romans 5:8: *“God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, a long way off, Christ died for us.”* She exhaled as if she had been carrying a weight for decades. A smile flickered on her lips. She let go of the thread and, for a moment, rested under the whole blanket and passed into eternity.

The Scripture: “All” of This Is from God

Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5 are breathtaking: *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”*

Notice what Paul doesn’t say. He doesn’t say, *“some of this is from God, and the rest is up to you.”* He doesn’t say, *“God reconciled you as long as you met the requirements.”* He says, *“All of this is from God.”* The blanket is entirely His weaving. No conditions. No loopholes. No fine print.

When we add conditions, we shrink the gospel, we reduce it to creeds and dogmas, rules. When we strip it back down to grace, we discover that His love has no seams to unravel.

The Pastoral Word: Why Conditions and Fences Are So Attractive

Why do people cling to conditions? Why do we erect fences? Maybe because conditions make us feel in control. Maybe because fences help us feel safe? If I do the right things, then God owes me something. Unconditional love terrifies us, because it means we cannot manipulate God. We can only receive Him.

When I put on God's lenses instead of my own, I see the truth: His love reaches me before I change, before I repent, before I am ready. And that love is what changes me, not conditions, not threats, not fear. It's God's lovingkindness that leads me to a change of mind with a corresponding change of behavior, that's repentance.

The Invitation: Rest Under the Blanket

Take a moment today to set aside your "threads of condition." Sit quietly. Place your hands in your lap, palms open. Whisper this prayer:

"All this is from You Father. I am loved without condition. I rest under Your covering."

Let the words settle like a blanket over your soul.

Journal Prompts

Where have I felt pressured to meet conditions in order to feel loved by God or others?

What would it look like for me to rest in the truth: *"All this is from God"*?

Can I recall a time when love reached me before I was ready or "good enough"?

Chapter 2 - The Thread of Fear

The Image: A Blanket of Fire

For many, the first blanket they were ever handed in the box church was woven not with comfort but with fire. They were convinced that church is where you go, not who you are. The language was urgent and terrifying: *"Turn or burn."* Faith was

presented not as a home to dwell in but as a fire escape to flee toward. Fear became the fabric of belief.

But fear is not a blanket, it is a thread. It doesn't cover you; it strangles you. It unravels trust. It leaves people huddled in shame, afraid of making one wrong move that might push them outside of God's reach.

The Story: A Child's First Gospel

I remember a boy I met in hospice who, even as a grown man, still carried the echoes of his childhood sermons. His body was failing, but it was his soul that trembled. *"Chaplain," he said, "I'm afraid I'll get there and He'll say I'm not good enough. I'm afraid of the fire."*

As he spoke, I realized his entire faith had been stitched together with fear. The blanket of God's love had been torn away, and all he had left was one thread of terror. He had been told God was quick to anger, slow to forgive, and ready to strike.

I leaned in close and read to him from 1 John 4:18: *"There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear."* He wept, not from fear this time, but from the possibility that God might not be the monster he had been taught to imagine.

The Scripture: Perfect Love

John writes with breathtaking clarity: *"God is love... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment."*

Fear and love cannot share the same blanket. Where love is present, fear is pushed out. Where fear dominates, love has been covered over.

God's way is not to control us through terror but to draw us with kindness. Romans 2:4 reminds us, *"It is His kindness that leads us to repentance,"* not His threats, not His anger, His kindness.

The Pastoral Word: Fear Keeps Us Small

Fear-based religion might keep people in line, but it never makes them free. Fear can modify behavior for a season, but it cannot transform the heart. Only love can do that.

The gospel is not a scare tactic; it is a love story. And when we rediscover that, our faith changes shape, it stops being a cage, and starts becoming a home.

The Invitation: Step Out of Fear

Today, pause and notice: where is fear shaping my view of God? Where do I imagine Him disappointed, angry, or waiting to punish me?

Take one of those fears and hold it up to the light of love. Whisper this prayer:

“Perfect Love, cast out my fear. Let Your kindness, not my terror, lead me home.”

Rest for a few moments in silence, allowing love to replace fear, until peace begins to stir.

Journal Prompts

What fears have shaped my image of God?

When I imagine God, do I picture a face of anger or of kindness?

How might I practice letting Perfect Love drive out fear in one area of my life this week?

Chapter 3 - The Thread of Performance

The Image: The Earned Blanket

Religion often tells us the blanket of God’s love must be earned. If you pray the right prayer, join the right church, take the right communion, or get baptized in the right way—then you can be covered. Without those performances, you are left bare.

But performance is not the blanket. It is a single thread, fragile and easily broken. When we clutch performance, we end up exhausted, always measuring, always wondering if we have done enough.

The Story: The Thief on the Cross

Two thieves hung beside Jesus. Both were guilty, both condemned. One mocked: *“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself and us!”* The other thief looked at Jesus’ suffering and said simply, *“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*

And what was Jesus' reply? Did He say, *"Yes, but first you must be baptized?"* No. Did He say, *"Yes, if you join the right church?"* No. Did He say, *"Yes, if you recite the sinner's prayer with proper theology?"* Of course not.

Jesus said only this: *"Today you will be with me in paradise."* No prerequisites. No performance. Just the whole blanket of grace wrapped around a dying man who had nothing left to offer but a cry to be embraced, covered, sheltered.

The Scripture: All This Is from God

Paul says it best: *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, not counting people's sins against them."* (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

Notice again: all of this is from God. Not half, not most, not *"with your cooperation."* All. The blanket is not woven by us, but for us.

When we cling to performance, we unravel the gospel, but when we rest in grace, we find ourselves already clothed in love.

The Pastoral Word: Hospice Confessions

I cannot count how many times I've sat with patients in their final hours who whispered, *"Chaplain, I hope I did enough."* Behind those words is a lifetime of clutching the performance thread.

And I always respond: *"Friend, you didn't do enough. You never could. But that was never the point. All of this is from Him; you are already remembered, already covered, already His, already home."*

Performance is the thread we let go of when we finally rest.

The Invitation: Drop the Thread

Today, notice where you are still trying to prove yourself. Where are you clutching the thread of performance, whispering, *"I hope I did enough?"*

Release it. Say aloud:

"All this is from You. Not from me. Today, I rest in grace."

Take a deep breath, as though pulling the blanket over yourself, and let go of the need to earn what has already been given freely. Matthew 10:8 reminds us, *"Freely you have received, freely give."* We cannot pay for what was freely given; relax in Him, through Him, by Him, for Him.

Journal Prompts

In what ways have I tried to “earn” love through performance?

What do I feel when I hear Jesus’ words: *“Today you will be with me in paradise”*?

What would it mean to release performance and rest in grace today?

Chapter 4 - *The Thread of Grief*

The Image: A Torn Blanket in the Valley

Grief has a way of tearing through the fabric of life. One day, the blanket of love and security feels whole; the next, it is ripped open by loss. We cling to a single thread, trying to hold ourselves together: memories, regrets, unanswered questions. But one thread cannot cover us.

Grief leaves us exposed, it reminds us that we are vulnerable, that life is fragile, that love always risks pain.

The Story: Hospice Tears

I remember sitting with a woman whose husband of sixty years had just passed. She held his wedding band in her hand like it was the last thread holding her to him. *“I don’t know how to go on,”* she whispered through tears. *“Everything feels empty now.”*

Her grief was honest. She wasn’t pretending, and she wasn’t “strong” in the way people often expect the bereaved to be. She was simply broken, and in that rawness, I thought of Psalm 23: *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”*

The valley is real; the shadow is real; the grief is real, and yet, we are not alone.

The Scripture: We Do Grieve, But Not Without Hope

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, *“We do not grieve like those who have no hope.”* Notice what it does not say, it does not say, *“We do not grieve.”* We do grieve, we ache, we weep, we lament.

But our grief is not hopeless, it is infused with a promise: that the Shepherd walks with us through the valley, that joy will come in the morning, that love is stronger than death.

The Pastoral Word: Your Own Losses

My wife Amy and I cannot read these scriptures without remembering our son Anthony, whose life ended too soon, I think of the tattered places left in us, places that no sermon or doctrine could ever patch.

And yet, even there, perhaps especially there, we have sensed the Shepherd whispering, *“I am with you; I will restore your souls.”*

Grief is not a thread we must clutch in shame; grief is a valley we walk through, step by trembling step, held by the One who does not let us go.

The Invitation: Honest Lament, Honest Hope

Where are you carrying grief today? A person? A relationship? A dream that died?

Pause. Name the loss aloud. Let it be as real as it is.

Pray. Whisper, *“Even though I walk through the valley, You are with me.”*

Rest. Imagine yourself lying down under a blanket, not a tattered one, but one whole and warm, God’s presence covering you in your sorrow.

Let your tears be prayers; let your grief be held, and let your hope, however faint, be anchored in the One who walks beside you.

Journal Prompts

What grief am I carrying right now? (Person, dream, relationship, season of life.)

How does Psalm 23 speak to me in that grief?

Where can I sense even the faintest hope alongside my grief?

Chapter 5 - The Thread of Anxiety

The Image: A Blanket Pulled Apart at Night

Anxiety feels like lying under a blanket full of holes. You try to rest, but every time you pull it closer, another tear appears. Worries slip through the gaps: What if I'm not enough? What if tomorrow falls apart? What if the people I love slip away from me?

A thread of anxiety cannot cover you. It unravels in your hands, leaving you restless, pacing in your thoughts long after the house has gone quiet.

The Story: Sleepless Hospice Nights

In hospice, anxiety often lingers at night. Families call me at all hours: *"Chaplain, Mom keeps waking up saying she's afraid, she's restless, she won't sleep."*

I sit beside their bed and hold their hand. Sometimes, all I can do is whisper prayers into the quiet: *"Be still and know that He is God."*

I've watched people soften, their breathing slow, their eyes finally close, not because their problems were solved, but because peace found them in the midst of fear.

The Scripture: The Three-Part Prescription

Paul writes in Philippians 4:6–7: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

It's almost like a prescription written out by the Great Physician:

1. Prayer – Simply talk to God. Tell Him what is weighing you down.
2. Supplication – Ask Him to supply what you cannot carry. Bring your need to Him honestly.
3. Thanksgiving – Don't stop short. Give thanks, even before the answer comes. Gratitude ties the whole remedy together.

And what follows is not just relief, but a peace that transcends understanding, not a logical fix, not a guarantee of smooth days, but a guarding peace, a shield over our heart and mind.

The Pastoral Word: Thanks-Living

I sometimes tell people: thanksgiving isn't just a holiday; it's a way of living: thanks-living. When I offer thanks in the middle of fear, it changes the way I see.

Anxiety says, *“I don’t have enough.”* Thanksgiving says, *“The Lord is my Shepherd; I lack nothing.”*

Gratitude doesn’t erase anxiety overnight, but it weaves the torn blanket back together, one stitch at a time.

The Invitation: Practice the Prescription

Try this today:

Step 1 – Prayer: Speak aloud one anxiety weighing on you.

Step 2 – Supplication: Ask God, *“Supply what I cannot carry.”*

Step 3 – Thanksgiving: Name one thing, however small, that you are thankful for in this moment.

Then sit in silence for a minute or two, allowing the peace of God to rest on you like a blanket, patching the torn places with threads of trust.

Journal Prompts

What anxieties keep me awake at night or weigh me down during the day?

How might I apply Paul’s “prescription” of prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving in a specific situation?

What is one thing I can thank God for today, even in the midst of anxiety?

Chapter 6 - The Thread of Trials

The Image: Threads Stretched Thin

Trials tug at the fabric of our lives, they stretch us, sometimes to the point of snapping. When hardship comes, it can feel like the blanket has been pulled apart, leaving only a thin, frayed thread to cling to. *“Why is this happening? How much more can I take? Will I make it through?”*

A single thread of trial cannot cover us, but strangely, those stretched threads are often where the Weaver does His deepest work.

The Story: “Why Me?”

I once sat with a man in hospice who had lived a very difficult life, broken relationships, lost jobs, and a body now failing from illness. His words cut me: *“Chaplain, I just don’t understand. Why me? Haven’t I suffered enough already?”*

I didn’t offer quick answers. Sometimes silence is the truest companion. But after a while I read to him from James 1: *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

He looked at me and said, *“So maybe all this suffering hasn’t been wasted?”* I nodded through tears. *“No, it hasn’t been wasted; the thread that feels stretched thin is the very thread God is weaving into something whole.”*

The Scripture: Perseverance as the Loom

James doesn’t say trials are joyful in themselves, he says they produce something: perseverance, maturity, completeness.

It is like Psalm 23 again: *“Even though I walk through the valley...”* The promise is not that the valley is avoided but that we walk through it. And in the walking, something forms in us: resilience, trust, hope.

The blanket may look torn, but the Weaver has not abandoned His work.

The Pastoral Word: Resilience in the Valley

Trials do not mean God has turned away, they mean life is being stretched, and in the stretching, we learn that His presence is enough.

I think of a bumper sticker I once saw: *“Stuff happens.”* The question is not whether trials will come; they will. The question is: what will be formed in us through them? Bitterness or perseverance? Despair or hope?

Faith does not deny the trial. Faith says, *“This is hard, but I am not alone. This is painful, but it is not wasted.”* Faith realizes that delay is not denial but a promise in gestation.

The Invitation: Reframe the Trial

What trial are you facing right now? A broken relationship? A financial struggle? A health crisis?

Step 1 – Name it. Speak honestly to God: *“This really hurts, this is not what I wanted.”*

Step 2 – Reframe it. Whisper: *“This is not wasted; let perseverance be formed in me.”*

Step 3 – Rest in it. Picture God weaving this trial into a larger blanket you cannot yet see. Trust that the stretched thread will one day be part of something whole, something magnificently beautiful and reverently cherished.

Journal Prompts

What trial am I facing right now that feels like a stretched or breaking thread?

How might I reframe this trial as something not wasted, but formative?

Where do I see perseverance being formed in me?

Chapter 7 - The Thread of Enemies

The Image: Eating Beside Your Foes

One of the strangest images in scripture is found in Psalm 23: *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*

If it were me, I’d prefer the enemies be removed before the meal begins. I’d prefer the blanket of peace to be free of conflict, but God does not always remove the enemies; instead, He sets a feast right in front of them.

A single thread of enmity cannot cover us; it only binds us in bitterness. But at the table of God, even the presence of enemies becomes part of the story of grace.

The Story: Ministry Wounds

In ministry, I’ve sat at many tables where conflict was thick in the air. I remember once being betrayed by people I had loved and served, their words cut deep, their rejection stung. For a while, all I could see was the unraveling, the friendship torn, trust shredded.

But in time, I discovered something surprising: God had set a different table for me, not a table of vindication, but a table of sustenance. In the presence of betrayal,

I found fresh streams of His love. In the presence of rejection, I discovered a deeper belonging.

The enemies did not vanish, but the Shepherd still served bread and wine.

The Scripture: Goodness in the Midst

The psalm does not say, “*You prepare a table once my enemies are gone,*” it says, “*in their presence,*” that’s where love will emerge.

This is the gospel’s strange power: God does not wait for perfect peace to feed us, He provides nourishment even when surrounded by strife, confusion, despair, outbursts.

Romans 12 echoes this: “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*” In other words, the table is not only for us, but through us, for those we’d rather exclude.

The Pastoral Word: Choosing the Table

Conflict is unavoidable. Betrayal is painful, but the invitation is not to clutch the thread of bitterness, it is to sit at the table of grace.

Enemies remind us that the world is broken. The table reminds us that love is stronger. To eat in their presence is to declare: God’s goodness is my portion, His mercy is my covering, I need not fear, even here.

The Invitation: Sit at the Table

Recall someone who has wounded or opposed you. Picture them seated across from you at a table.

Now picture Christ at the head, breaking bread, pouring wine. Hear Him say to you: “*Surely goodness and mercy will follow you, even here.*”

Rest in the truth that His abundance is not diminished by conflict; the table is set; the cup overflows.

Journal Prompts

Who has wounded or opposed me that still lingers in my mind?

How might I picture Christ preparing a table for me in that very presence?

What would it mean for me to rest at that table, even with enemies nearby?

Chapter 8 - *Reweaving the Blanket*

The Image: From Threads to Wholeness

By now we've seen the many ways religion and life can unravel us. Conditions, fear, performance, grief, anxiety, trials, enemies, all of them are threads we sometimes clutch desperately, mistaking them for the whole.

But God has never given us just a thread, He has given us a whole covering, woven in love from beginning to end. What we hold in tatters, He reweaves in grace. Love covers. 1 Peter 4:8 reminds us, "*Love covers a multitude of sins,*" it doesn't ignore, or excuse. Love restores; love unifies.

The Story: A Hospice Covering

I remember a patient near the end of his life who often grew cold at night. One evening a nurse tucked a fresh blanket around him, soft, whole, warm. He sighed and whispered, "*That feels better.*"

That image has never left me. He didn't need another thread to twist between his fingers; He needed a whole blanket to rest under.

So do we.

The Scripture: The Weaver at Work

2 Peter 1:3–4 says: "*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.*"

Do you hear the fullness? Everything we need; Very great and precious promises; not one thin thread, but the whole woven covering.

Remember, Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:18: "*All this is from God.*" Not some. Not half. All.

The Pastoral Word: The Blanket of Presence

When I think of the gospel, I no longer imagine a set of conditions, threats, or performances. I imagine a blanket, wide enough to cover us all, warm enough to

heal our shivering souls, strong enough to hold together when life tears at the seams.

This is the ministry of reconciliation: God not counting our sins against us, but wrapping us in His presence, then sending us to wrap others with the same.

The blanket is not for us alone, it overflows, spilling outward in mercy, kindness, and forgiveness, until enemies become companions and strangers become family.

The Invitation: Rest and Reweave

Take a real blanket today. Lay it across your shoulders or spread it over your lap. As you do, pray slowly:

“All this is from You. Cover me. Heal me. Reweave me.”

And then, when you rise, ask: Who in my life needs a corner of this blanket today? Offer them kindness, forgiveness, or comfort. In doing so, you join the Weaver’s work.

Closing Blessing

Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

Journal Prompts

Which thread (fear, conditions, performance, grief, anxiety, trials, enemies) do I find myself most often clinging to?

How has God been reweaving wholeness in my story, even when I did not notice?

Who in my life might need me to extend a “corner of the blanket” this week?

Epilogue

From Threads to Wholeness

You began this journey holding threads, threads of fear, performance, conditions, grief, anxiety, trials, enemies. You may have recognized some in your own hands. Perhaps you saw the ways religion, or even your own heart, has taught you to clutch them tightly.

But now I hope you see: you were never meant to hold a thread. You were meant to rest under the whole.

The gospel is not a leash of conditions, a threat of fear, or a test of performance. It is a blanket—woven in love, stretched wide enough to cover every failure, every wound, every loss.

As you close this book, I invite you to do something simple: find a real blanket. Lay it across your shoulders or pull it up under your chin. Breathe deep, and let yourself imagine: This is God’s love. It covers me. It holds me. It will not unravel.

And then, remember: the blanket is not for you alone. Extend its corner to someone else. Sit with the grieving. Comfort the anxious. Love your enemy. Tell the weary: *“All this is from God.”*

In the end, the blanket is not tattered. It is whole. And so are you.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

*Cover me, Weaver of Love.
Gather my threads, torn and frayed.
Stitch me together in mercy.
Let me rest beneath Your wholeness,
and let me carry the blanket of Your love
into a world unraveling. Amen*

Dedication

To Amy, my dream girl and my “more” girl,
whose love has been a covering and a home.

To our children, Meagan, Melodie Joy, Noah, Sabrina, Gina and Jonathon,
each one a thread of beauty in the fabric of my life.

To my brothers, Vito and Mario,
faithful companions, encouragers, and friends.

And to our son Anthony,
whose absence has temporarily torn our hearts,
yet whose memory is forever woven into our souls.

Acknowledgments

This book, like the others before it, was not written alone.

To my wife, Amy, you are my constant encourager, the one who asks the questions that lead me back to wisdom.

To my family and brothers, who have walked with me through unraveling and repair, your lives are threads of grace in my own story.

To the patients and families that I have served in hospice, who have taught me that the most fragile moments can reveal the strongest presence.

And to the Weaver of all things—who re-stitches what is torn, covers what is exposed, and holds us in the Love that will not unravel.

“For all who long to be held in love that will not unravel.”