



THE DIVINE *Kitchen*

CHAPTER 1

GOD HAS A RECIPE

Chocolate Gravy. Yes, you read that correctly. Whenever I say that phrase to people, the typical response I get is something like “Do you mean brown gravy?” Or perhaps people think I’m confusing it with sausage gravy, which is popular around the southern part of the USA and beyond. However, neither of those assumptions would be correct.

In certain parts of the Deep South, there is a delectable delicacy known as chocolate gravy. It’s as delicious and fattening as you can imagine. Just to whet your appetite, it is best poured over an open biscuit while the gravy is still hot enough to melt the butter resting atop each half of the biscuit.

It was a staple of my childhood. My mother was the connoisseur of this incredible concoction. Several years ago, I decided that I wanted to evangelize a new generation to the good news of chocolate gravy. I had never made it before, but the desire to experience a childhood delicacy and share it with some of my friends kindled the passion to take to the kitchen and get to work, bringing the heaven of chocolate gravy to the earth of some hot biscuits.

There was only one slight problem. I had no idea how to actually make chocolate gravy. This brought me to step one of the process. Pick up the phone and call Mom. My Mom, in many ways, is the quintessen-

tial Southern woman. One wouldn't regard her as a chef, but if you want to eat some good down-home food, she's your girl.

Pick up the phone and call Mom.

It didn't take long on the phone to realize we had somewhat of a problem on our hands. My mother had made chocolate gravy for so long that when she started telling me how to make it, there was no clear, identifiable recipe. The next few minutes involved me asking questions like "how much is a dash?" and what do you mean when you say a "pinch?" All of her measurements were based on instinct, experience, and just a general base of knowledge that I didn't have. She was telling me the ingredients; there was basic information, and plenty of description. The only thing missing was a recipe.

A few days later, I went to Mom's house, and we began searching for the truth about chocolate gravy. She was convinced she had the recipe somewhere. Like searching for the lost Ark of the Covenant, we dug through drawers, cabinets, and closets in search of this ancient treasure. After turning page after page, looking through one recipe and then another, we finally found it! Just like Abraham's Ram caught in the thicket, like the coin in the mouth of Peter's fish, there it was.

In the back of one of her old cookbooks, on a handwritten slip of paper, we found the Holy Grail of chocolate gravy. As clear as day, ingredients listed, with exact measurements, and specific instructions, I had actually found a recipe that could be duplicated and repeated.

To be clear, I'm not a chef, baker, cook, or perhaps anyone who even belongs in a kitchen. However, I'm confident that, whether or not you cook or bake frequently, you have perhaps been inspired by something you saw on Pinterest or TikTok and felt the strong desire to recreate the

dish that made your taste buds come alive at the very sight. You know how important a recipe is. Correct information regarding ingredients, exact measurements, and precise temperature settings, and I really need to know exactly how long I should leave this thing on the stove or in the oven.

FINDING WHAT WAS LOST

The search for my beloved chocolate gravy reminds me of a story from the Old Testament. First and Second Samuel, as well as First and Second Kings, tell the cyclical story of Israel returning to God and subsequently falling away again. The seasons of returning to God resulted in experiencing God's blessing. The safety, prosperity, and comfort of God's blessing would often lead to the neglect of God's Word. This would inevitably produce a falling away, which would result in the removal of the blessings of God. Wash, rinse, and repeat. (See Judges 2:11-12).

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One of those instances was during the days of King Josiah, recorded in 2 Kings. It's helpful to remember that Josiah became king at 8 years of age. I'm betting you've probably never looked around at your little ones and thought, "I bet they're ready to lead an entire nation." What's even more incredible than an 8-year-old becoming the King of the southern part of Israel is the fact that he actually did a good job!

King Josiah had been preceded by two Kings the Bible describes as wicked. Idol worship had become rampant in Judah, and the temple had experienced years of neglect and decay. One of the first tasks Josiah took on was repairing the House of God.

The Bible records that the High Priest tasked to oversee the renovation of the Temple was a man named Hilkiah. I honestly have no idea what had been going on in the Temple up to that point, or how exactly it was being used. All we know is that there had been decades of neglect and abandonment. During the renovations and rejuvenation, something incredible happened.

The Bible says it this way: “And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.’ And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.” (2 Kings 22:8, ESV)

Like my mother and I finding the chocolate gravy recipe, Hilkiah and Shaphan had found the Book of the Law. At some point, digging through the cupboards, cabinets, and drawers of the Holy Temple, they found the most important recipe in human existence. The book of God’s laws and instructions. The instructions given through Moses were on how Israel was to relate to God on both a national and personal level. The clear instructions on how they were to relate to God for themselves and collectively as a society.

Previous generations had kept the scroll containing the law of God beside the Ark of the Covenant. I don’t know why my mind does this because it’s not explicitly stated in Scripture, but I have always pictured the scroll leaning against the Ark of the Covenant. For ancient Israel, the Ark of the Covenant was representative of the literal presence of God. The Presence and the Book were together, perhaps even touching in the House of God.

Those moments represented Israel’s golden ages. The years and seasons when they were close to God’s heart. At some point, the Book of the Law was evidently removed, maybe even with good intentions. It could have been put somewhere for safekeeping, assuming everyone would

know where it was. Most likely, it was carelessness and dishonor that made the decision to put it out of sight and out of mind.

Year after year and King after King went by until no one knew where the book was. Life was still happening. Decisions were being made. All different types of worship emanated from Israel. Cultural habits were being formed. Laws and regulations were being established. The only problem was that they had lost the recipe book.

Israel had added a pinch of this, a dash of that, a smidgen of idol worship, a tad of Baal, a drop of Molech, and a heap of Asherah. Those were the false idols that were prevalent in the surrounding cultures of their day.

Soon, they were cooking something that wasn't very appetizing to the Lord. That is, until the day Hilkiah stumbled on the recipe book. He quickly took it to Shaphan, the personal secretary to Josiah. Shaphan then read the book in its entirety to King Josiah. All of the instructions given to Moses, all of the laws, all of the commandments, all of the promises, and I'm sure his ears perked up when Shaphan got to the part about the assurance of blessing or cursing laid out in Deuteronomy.

The exact recipe had been recorded, lost, and now rediscovered. The Bible records that Josiah was distraught after that particular story time. He realized at that moment how contaminated the culture of Israel had become and how far his predecessors had fallen away from the original recipe that God had given them. It was time not only to repair the neglected temple, but also to go to work to purify the national society and culture that had been simmering in Israel for decades and decades. After all, this was their Scriptures.

The Scriptures had been neglected and eventually lost. Bad ingredients had been added, and what was cooking didn't pass the smell test. Like trying to cook something from an image on Pinterest without exact

instructions, a disaster was brewing.

THE BIBLE AS A RECIPE BOOK

If you're like me, you have heard the Bible described in various ways. Perhaps the most frequent description I've heard over the years is that it's "a love letter from God." Or maybe something along the lines of "a roadmap for life." Or maybe the cheesy acronym B.I.B.L.E.: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. I know. I'm laughing hysterically, too. So clever and funny.

None of those descriptions is necessarily wrong or harmful, but perhaps a bit incomplete. It gives the idea that the Bible is intended to be a personal devotional book. Certainly, we should receive it personally, read it personally, and learn to relate to God in personal ways.

Please understand I'm not trying to diminish a personal love, devotion, or commitment to the Word of God. However, I think, like King Josiah, there is a fresh discovery that needs to be made. That rediscovery? The Bible is a recipe book for society, humanity, and civilization as a whole.

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My friend used a phrase a few years ago that I've used so often that I basically claim it as my own now. What are friends for but taking credit for their brilliance? The phrase is "the Bible is optimal for human flourishing." Does the Bible contain personal teachings for individual lives? Absolutely. Should we read it in our personal devotions and seek to apply it to our individual lives? Of course. Is the Bible intended to have social and societal impact far beyond our own individual lives?

100% YES!

If I can add one more way to see the Scripture, it would be a recipe book for societal success. A list of ingredients, exact measurements, specific instructions that bake a society into something palatable not just to God, but for the savor of society. The Bible creates beautiful concoctions.

We tend to think that government and politics are what cook up the tastiest treats of our society. Creations like freedom, liberty, prosperity, self-identity, family, and even our safety and security. If we dig a little deeper, we find out that our earthly governments and political leaders aren't creating the recipe; they are following a recipe. The only question is, which recipe is being followed and what final product is being cooked?

For most of my adult life, I heard and ascribed to the phrase "you can't legislate morality." In a particular season of my life several years ago, I was starting to realize that I was perpetually hearing narratives without any understanding of where they came from. It was during that season that I once again heard that statement and began to wonder whether it actually had any Scriptural or truthful foundation. It was said repeatedly and widely accepted, but the only question was whether it was part of the original recipe God had intended.

There was a moment when clarity came. Every law is a moral law. Murder is against the law because we fundamentally believe as a society that it is morally wrong to take another person's life. Breaking into your neighbor's house and stealing things from their home is wrong because we morally believe it is wrong to take something that doesn't belong to you. Even lesser crimes like speeding are based on a moral law. Driving over certain speeds on certain roads can heighten the chance of an accident and, in turn, endanger someone else's safety and well-being.

We're probably all a little guilty of violating that one, but you won't

see major protests demanding the removal of speed limits, because as a whole we all morally agree that not having speed limits would lead to anarchy and chaos on our streets, causing danger, harm, and destruction. Having too much to drink and getting behind the wheel of a car puts innocent people in harm's way. We rightfully deem it morally wrong. The list could go on and on.

HIGHER THINKING

So, if every law is a moral law, the only question is whose morality determines the law? To say it another way. What recipe is being used to determine what is moral or immoral, right or wrong, and punishable or acceptable to a society? Even in our own homes, we have laws. Without them, toddlers become tyrants. We shape bedtime laws, dietary laws, and behavioral rules for our children. Laws are established. Laws like “No, you can’t have 12 cookies and stay up watching Paw Patrol until 1:00 am.”

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Those poor little tykes must think this place is like a prison. However, the laws remain. Each rule of the home is based on what we think serves them best, regardless of whether or not they like it or even understand it.

I’m certainly not trying to demean the whole of human existence to the level of a toddler, who is very much, and very understandably, in an age of immaturity and lack of knowledge. However, when we compare human thinking to divine thinking, maybe the illustration isn’t very

far off.

After all, Scripture reminds us in Isaiah:

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the
heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV).*

Human thinking will never replace divine thought. In every facet of society, we are given the option to follow a recipe. Our laws, policies, values, cultural norms, and even behaviors are being cooked by a recipe. Looking back over history and some of the dark periods of humanity, it's clear to see that human thought has created recipes that have produced some unappetizing results, to say the least. God, on the other hand, is the divine chef.

If we are being honest, God's recipe isn't always what we want to eat. My wife and I have two children. One came out of the womb eating pretty much everything we set before her. Even today, she eats more vegetables than her Dad. The other one. Well, he's pretty much been opposed to almost everything we've tried to set before him. Once, while trying to get him to eat a vegetable, he told me, “Broccoli is my enemy.”

Not everything in God's cookbook is always palatable and agreeable to our human nature. Humanity has a way of perpetually choosing a toddler's diet on a societal level. We tend to want to consume what feels good in the moment, in spite of whether or not it's nutritious or helpful to our overall health. This is an important thought. In our humanity, sometimes we choose what feels right to us as individuals instead of considering what's healthiest for us as a society.

How we view Scripture personally, corporately as the church, and cul-

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turally as a society will determine the recipe we are working with. The Bible is both our book of devotion to personally know God and our best option for producing a world that is free, prosperous, safe, and blessed. In the chapters ahead, we will seek to rediscover the recipes that shape our homes, families, and ultimately the world in which we live.



RECIPE NOTES

- God has a recipe, and His recipe is good.
 - When Scripture gets lost, culture starts cooking with whatever is available.
 - The Bible is not only for personal devotion; it is also wisdom for society.
 - God's recipe may not always satisfy our appetite, but it always serves our health.
 - A society without Scripture is a kitchen without instructions.
 - The Bible is designed for human flourishing.
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TABLE TALK

1. Where do you feel the most pressure to follow culture's recipe instead of God's: your home, parenting, marriage, work, church, politics, or the way you think about yourself?
2. What voices are currently shaping the "recipe" in your home or family the most? Are they forming you toward Scripture or away from it?
3. Jason says the Bible is more than a personal devotional book; it is wisdom for society. How does that challenge the way you think about issues that are usually called "political" or "cultural"?
4. If every law is a moral law, whose morality do you think is shaping the world your children are growing up in?

5. What is one area where God's recipe feels hard to receive because culture's version seems easier, kinder, more popular, or more comfortable?
 6. What would it look like this week to bring one part of your home, family, or thinking back under the authority of Scripture?
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PASS THE SALT

Choose one area of your life where you are helping shape someone else's recipe: your children, marriage, friendships, small group, or workplace. Identify one Truth from Scripture that needs to be restored.