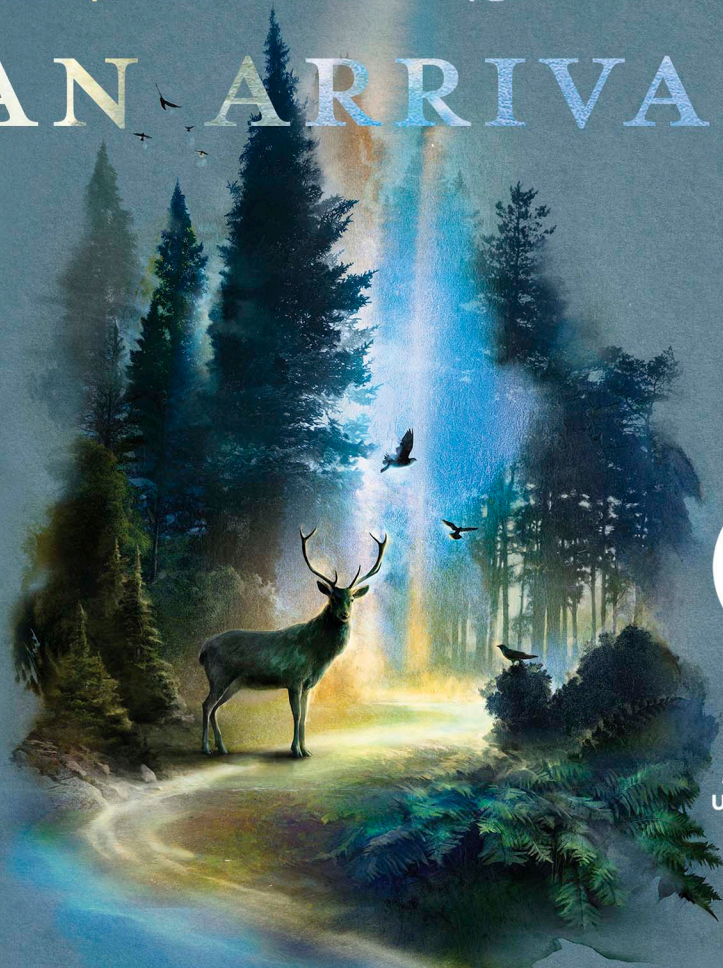


EVERY STEP AN ARRIVAL



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A 90-DAY DEVOTIONAL
FOR EXPLORING GOD'S WORD

EUGENE H. PETERSON

Translator of
THE MESSAGE

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LETTER TO THE READER

Dear Reader,

Eugene Peterson has long loved Denise Levertov's poem "Overland to the Islands." The poet conjures up the image of a dog moving "intently haphazard," sniffing and dancing over rocks and mud, disdaining nothing his nose registers along the way. But the dog has a trick afoot, which is that he always

keeps moving, changing
pace and approach but
not direction—"every step an arrival."*

At first glance, the words, thoughts, and phrases we've curated from Eugene Peterson's library of sermons may have a very intently haphazard feel. One devotion doesn't logically follow the next, and there's no thematic thread sewn clearly through each entry. Peterson would say something like, "Welcome to the spiritual life." An organized approach is never the goal but rather a wide-eyed curiosity that disdains nothing and is willing to sniff out anything

* . Denise Levertov, *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 2002), 7.

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that captures the attention. Living a life with such discipline indeed makes every step an arrival.

We hope you'll allow these scriptures and thoughts to take your mind and heart wherever they may go. You never know what the Spirit will use to encourage or challenge or humble or comfort. But don't forget the dog's trick, as it will serve you well moving through the next ninety days—just keep moving.

Two final things. The devotions lend themselves to shedding light on your life or on God's nature. Obviously at times these two areas dovetail, but keeping the distinction in mind can be helpful as you work through these ninety days. In addition, each entry is followed by a pause of sorts—sometimes a question, sometimes a reflection. You could even use the words there to form your own prayer for the day, certainly not as an ending point but rather as a beginning for the arrivals that await you.

Sincerely,
WaterBrook and Multnomah Editorial Team

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DAY 1

The Contrast of Darkness and Light

God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

God spoke: "Light!"

And light appeared.

—Genesis 1:1–3

There is significance in the first day's creative act: God said, "Light!" And light appeared. The universe is established with God's light shining through everything. There is a profound understanding of this in the way in which a day is described in Genesis and subsequently in all Jewish life. "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (verse 5, rsv). An odd way to describe a day, but not if you see it as a victory of God's light. *Evening* has the sense, in Hebrew, of termination, bringing to a conclusion. A day is described first as the conclusion of the creative work of God, then night, a time of sleep, the incursion of darkness, a

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threat to the order of creation, a sign of chaos to come. Does night or light have the last word? The answer is in the phrase “and there was morning, one day.”

Morning in Hebrew has the meaning of “penetration.”* God’s day is not complete until light shines again, penetrating the darkness and dispersing the shadows. The creative action of God is light, which encloses and limits a temporary darkness. All that we see as a threat to God’s creative action is held in check and controlled by his light. The shadows are there—night descends upon life—and there is that which seems to defy God, to disturb his order and his purpose: sickness, death, trouble, and sorrow. But it does not have the last word: “And there was morning, one day.”



Identify an area of your life in which you need God’s light to penetrate the dimness. Will night or light have the last word? Talk with God about the clarity you seek.

* . Strong’s Concordance, s.v. “boqer: morning,” <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/1242.htm>.

DAY 2

The Best Start in Understanding Ourselves

God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.
He created them male and female.
God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take
charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and
birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on
the face of Earth."

—Genesis 1:27-28

When we Christians want to understand ourselves accurately and deeply, we don't put ourselves in front of a mirror. Persons who stand before mirrors are not famous for the accuracy or depth of their self-understanding. Friends can give valuable insight, but each insight is only a fragment of the reality. When we want to sharpen and deepen self-understanding, we look at Adam.

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I hope when I pronounce the name *Adam* you will not think of a nude figure strolling through a semitropical garden with flowers woven through his hair, murmuring small talk with lions and parakeets, and plucking an occasional pomegranate for a snack. No, Adam is you. Adam is the point at which our self-understanding begins. The Bible does not describe the anatomy of Adam; it does not discuss the psychology of Adam; it does not give us the history of Adam. In those respects, Adam is a great mystery. What we get are a few lines that set forth the meaning of Adam. We discover in him the essentials of what it means to be a human being: we are a result of God's creative work, we are created to be in relation with other people, and we are responsible for the world around us.



Often our confusion about the world begins with a lack of clarity regarding who we are. Who are you in relation to others, in relation to God, and in relation to the world? Ask God to make clear to you who he made you to be and what it means to be fully human in his eyes.

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DAY 3

Our Faithful God Is Changeless

Until you return to that ground yourself,
dead and buried;
you started out as dirt, you'll end up dirt.

—Genesis 3:19

We desperately need this reminder. It sounds just a bit archaic and is denied by many present circumstances. We are constantly reminded and inevitably impressed with our power. We can do nearly anything we want. No longer bound to the cycles of the seasons, we create our own heat in winter and cold in summer. No longer restricted by the natural rhythms of night and day, we produce our own light and work where we will. We are born in immaculate, germ-free hospitals; grow up in controlled, managed environments; and live our lives dominated by machines, gadgets, inventions, and constructions. We are not dependent on God's creation and scarcely give it a thought, and then only on vacation.

Meanwhile, a tragic thing has happened to us: we've grown fearful. And panic follows terror and leaves a legacy of anxiety that

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has become the permanent spiritual characteristic of our age. Our times are marked by spiritual disorientation and a haunting soullessness. It is not easy to remember that we are dust, even if we want to. So what do we do?

Here is a single and concrete suggestion: pray a penitential prayer. Psalm 102 is a good place to begin. Read it aloud, start to finish. Remember that you are dust. And remember that the Lord is “enthroned for ever; [his] name endures to all generations” (verse 12, RSV).



Awakened by restlessness in the night, we fail to shut out our fears. We are taken to our most vulnerable place, the place where we acknowledge we have no control over our destiny. Release your vulnerabilities and fears to God as you pray through Psalm 102.

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DAY 4

Unexpected Evidence of God's Love

GOD told him, "No. Anyone who kills Cain will pay for it seven times over." GOD put a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one who met him would kill him.

Cain left the presence of GOD and lived in No-Man's-Land, east of Eden.

—Genesis 4:15–16

The natural course of sin is damnation and death. Left to itself, it avalanches to its own destruction. Resentment breeds resentment, greed begets greed, anger causes anger, lust provokes lust, reprisals ignite worse reprisals, and deceit is matched by deceit. The cycle of sin spirals, increasing in intensity and rushing to destroy itself by its own acts. Anybody can see that, and everybody experiences it.

But then God breaks the cycle. He intervenes in this relentless, compulsive, cause-effect sequence with "Not so!" God does this divinely creative act, placing a mark of his redeeming love on man the sinner so that there is an opportunity to respond to love and

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grace. Cain was not relieved of the loneliness, the wandering, and the sense of loss that followed his murdering his brother. But he was able to go to a new place and found a city and became ancestor to a series of creative giants. The mark God placed on him enabled him to live beyond the guilt and judgment he well deserved but God did not permit. Cain carried with him the consequences of his sin, but he did not carry God's continuing anger. It was just the opposite: Cain was marked with the sign of God's protective care.



Think about the ways you are living with the consequences of things you have done and said. Ask God to help you make amends, to make restitution to those you have wronged. As you do this, ask him to show you the marks of his love placed on you.

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DAY 5

God Is Not a Problem Solver On Call

GOD did to Sarah what he promised: Sarah became pregnant and gave Abraham a son in his old age, and at the very time God had set. Abraham named him Isaac.

—Genesis 21:2-3

As simple as they are, birth stories do some things for persons of faith that need doing over and over and over again, for our tendency is to do one of two things with God. One is to flatten him down into the banal and the humdrum. We lose all sense of mystery. We reduce him to morals or platitudes or a genial source of good advice. We lose all sense of the transcendent or the glorious or the beyond. The other tendency is to sentimentalize God into diversion or entertainment. We fantasize him and hope for an escape from whatever we don't like about what is happening to us at the time. Most of us do one of these two things alternately, yet our lives are unchanged.

The message of the gospel is that God invades us with new

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life, and the life changes what we presently are. He is not a means by which we solve problems. He is not a means to avoid problems. He creates new life. He is not a problem solver but a person creator. These birth stories are all around you—in the person of your child or your wife or your husband or your friend or your parent or your brother or your sister or your neighbor. Be observant. Be aware.



God is “not a problem solver but a person creator.” Have you viewed God as a means to an end, a divine solution to problems rather than a Creator who walks with you through life? Ask him to birth a holy awe in your life.

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DAY 6

Roadblocks Mean Nothing to God

I'll bless you—oh, how I'll bless you! And I'll make sure that your children flourish—like stars in the sky! like sand on the beaches! And your descendants will defeat their enemies. All nations on Earth will find themselves blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me.

—Genesis 22:17-18

This is not a story about Abraham, a hero of the faith who survived all odds to become the father of the Hebrew nation. Abraham is only the person in whom the election and promise of God achieve visibility and historical verification. We are always making human-interest stories out of the biblical characters, trying to extract some moral that we can imitate. But it is a waste of time for the most part. There is so little to imitate. Only a couple of incidents in Abraham's life are worthy of imitation, and not being shepherders in the Middle Bronze Age, we are not capable of reliving them anyway. No, this is a story about God's choice of man

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(of us!) and how he resourcefully and masterfully completes his purpose despite every roadblock, every diversion, every sin, and all unbelief. It is the story about God's choice of you and how he successfully executes his will in you.

At the same time there is something we can do. Even though we are not at the center of the stage, we are not merely spectators. The great thing that Abraham did was he “believed the LORD; and [the LORD] reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, RSV). This we can do as well.



God chose to work out his will on earth through humanity. That means he chose you to be part of the process. Join Abraham in believing God's promise.

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DAY 7

Resurrection Faith in Song

Moses and the Israelites sang this song to
GOD, giving voice together,
I'm singing my heart out to GOD—what
a victory!
He pitched horse and rider into the
sea.

—Exodus 15:1

The Song of Moses is a case study in response. Singing is what people do when they believe in what God has done. It's the most expressive way in which we make known our faith. It catches up not only our minds but also our emotions, puts our bodies into operation, so that as a whole we give expression to what we believe. The Song of Moses is obviously a resurrection faith directed to God. Resurrection faith is directed to God. It knows that God has made the difference. It realizes the impact of God on our lives.

The characteristic form of writing for Egypt, for Babylonia, for Assyria, for the Hittites—all these neighboring nations—was not a song but an enemies list, a compilation of all the kings they had killed, the armies they had vanquished, and the cities they had

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devastated. The result was long, interminable, dull statistics. That's often the way men react to the reality of victory when they believe they are in charge. All they can do is gather data and make statistics out of it. The Hebrews did something very different. They sang a song, packed with exact and vivid metaphors: "The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (RSV). Rather than regurgitating data, the Hebrews revel in exact detail. Rather than compiling a boring list for the reader, the Hebrews invite us into something set in motion, something going forward: a song.



Rather than keeping a ledger of defeated enemies, God's ancient people voiced their resurrection faith in song to him. Name one way God has made a difference in your life. Now tell the story back to him in the spirit of song.

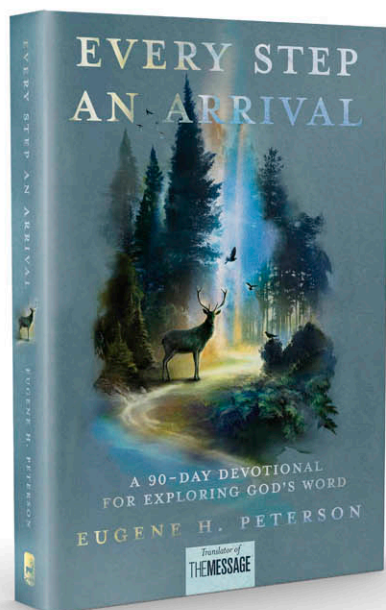
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