God beyond our knowing, give us the courage to give up our illusions and to seek you, the God who is greater than our imagination, wiser than our wisdom, more dazzling than the universe, as present as the air we breathe and utterly beyond our comprehension or control. Amen.

_Credit to Barbara Brown Taylor_
“I would love to report that what I found in the prosperity gospel was something so foreign and terrible to me that I was warned away, but what I discovered was both familiar and painfully sweet: the promise that I could curate my life, minimize my losses, and stand on my successes. And no matter how many times I rolled my eyes at the creeds outrageous certainties, I craved them just the same. I had my own Prosperity Gospel, a flowering weed grown in with all the rest.”

— Kate Bowler, Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved

Chapter 5 of Bell’s book is a meditation on the gospel at its most elemental and most challenging: *God is for us.*

“Gospel is the shocking, provocative, revolutionary, subversive, counterintuitive good news that in your moments of greatest despair, failure, sin, weakness, losing, failing, frustration, inability, helplessness, wandering, and falling short, God meets you there – right there – right exactly there – in that place, and announces, I am on your side” (135-136).

1. Bell emphasizes that God being for us is unconditional, that is, God is not for us because of what we have done or failed to do, because of our faith or our good deeds or anything else. God is with us because it is the nature of God to be with us. We see this hinted at in the Christmas story: Emmanuel, God-with-us. How do you react to this idea of unconditional grace?

2. Bell also emphasizes that while it’s one thing to know this, it’s another thing to experience it, to live out of its truth. Here he emphasizes the importance of confession, admitting, being honest about our need. Why is it so hard for us to be honest about this?