

# The Incarnation Of The Word

In the beginning, the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.

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## Lessons From The Seven Churches

Right from the beginning the church was flawed, as Jesus always knew she would be, and she has been flawed ever since; a living, breathing contradiction.

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## Fidelity In Friendship

Derived from the Latin word *fidēlis*, fidelity is the quality of being faithful, loyal, accurate, or true. And it's a quality essential to all authentic, interpersonal relationships.

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# Living Intentionally

The goal of being more like God doesn't come naturally or happen randomly, it requires purposeful choice in a specific direction.

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## Without The Applause: Examining Celebrity Culture In The Church

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I recently wrote an article which I called '[Beneath The Skin](#)'; a critique of sorts of modern Christianity and the Western church.

The article focused primarily on the collective Christian identity; *The Church*, not on any one particular denomination or way of 'doing church' but, rather, on the church's influence and presence, as a whole, in the world today. I endeavored to identify both *the good* and *the bad*, historically and now, but, in particular, I was looking for an answer to a specific question: what was beneath the skin of the modern, Western church?

Was there still a heart beating for Jesus, a life still given in allegiance to the king?

Was the church still the 'woman of valour' for whom Jesus died, shining brightly in a darkened and impoverished world through her most basic and guiding principle: that is, to

incarnate Christ?

Or had she exchanged her birthright for a mess of pottage, trading persecution for privilege, and skeptical dismissal for a platform of popularity?

In this article, I want to dig a little deeper, to take a closer look at one of the issues I think played a part in asking this question. I want to examine the phenomenon of *celebrity culture* within the modern Western church and, in particular, the influence this culture has had on the average, ordinary Christian.

## **Social Reach**

With the rise of social media and the massive reach of online platforms, there's no doubt that the ability of the Christian faith to be expressed and shared has increased exponentially. The ability to virtually connect, through live streaming or recorded services, was demonstrated to be invaluable in more recent times when many churches worldwide were forced to close their physical doors during the COVID-19 crisis. For many people, this was the only way they were able to still 'go to church' and connect with their faith community through long periods of isolation and disconnection.

Many faith communities now count in their membership those who may only attend church virtually (for a variety of reasons) and the reach of these various faith communities, in terms of missions and evangelism, goes well beyond their actual geographic borders.

It seems hard to believe, but the means that makes this even possible – the internet – is only just over 30 years old. Although an electronic information network of sorts already existed prior to the early 80s, it was almost entirely text-based and difficult to use and barely resembled the online network that we recognise today.

*“Almost everything which you needed to know in your daily life was written down somewhere,”* Berners-Lee [creator of the World Wide Web], told NPR’s *Fresh Air* in 1996. *“And at the time, in the 1980s, it was almost certainly written down on a computer somewhere. It was very frustrating that people’s effort in typing it in was not being used when, in fact, if it could only be tied together and made accessible, everything would be so much easier for everybody.”*

In April 1993, everything changed forever. The World Wide Web was launched into the public domain, becoming the first royalty-free, easy-to-use means of browsing the emerging information network that developed into the Internet as we know it today. It’s estimated that there are now 5.19 billion internet users (of a total world population of 8.1 billion people (as at August 2023)). The total number of internet users around the world has grown by 105 million during the past 12 months alone.

In the three decades since the web went public, the way in which we communicate, how information is shared, and how we connect has changed completely. The internet has expanded the reach of many valuable causes and community endeavours, but it has also increased the level of propaganda and disinformation, as well as challenging our standards of privacy and security.

For Christianity, this level of connectivity is somewhat of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity for preaching, mission activities, and the expression of faith to be shared on a global scale in a time-effective manner. But, particularly for the individual, it also offers the alluring possibility of a global stage, with the ability to curate a popular (but often artificial) public persona, within the reach of millions through a simple tap of the keyboard. Anyone can become *someone*, with something to say and an audience to hear it.

Obscurity, mediocrity, and martyrdom have been replaced by an

unnatural emphasis on personas, platforms, and profits. The era of 'Celebrity Christianity' is well and truly upon us.

## A Toxic Culture Of Self

Don't get me wrong. I love the internet and social media as much as the next person. I believe huge value can be added to the church; to our various ministries, and to the lives of regular, ordinary Christians through collaborating together in this form of information exchange. Social media and the internet are phenomenal tools for sharing the gospel, enabling churches to be more discoverable in their local area, and for sharing resources with a wider audience than only in-person services would allow. This kind of exposure may make a church or an individual Christian *well-known*, however, but not necessarily result in *celebrity* status.

Celebrity, unlike fame, is another animal altogether. While celebrity can't exist without fame – broad public recognition, it goes beyond mere recognition alone, devolving into intense public interest, attention, and, frequently, adulation. This *cult of personality*, particularly when related to individuals, often focuses entirely on what is perceived or promoted, not necessarily what is real, with the idolising of an individual creating a level of adoration beyond what is natural or healthy.

Celebrity Christianity turns an individual into a brand, encourages the promotion of self, necessitates the ongoing careful curation of a popular public image, irrespective of whether it is authentic, and runs the risk of reducing the gospel to merely a vehicle for global Christian consumerism.

Within Celebrity Christianity, ministries, churches, and people's faith are often orientated around a central, charismatic figure who wields immense social influence and power, but whose platform is devoid of personal proximity or systems of accountability.

Writer and editor Katelyn Beaty, in her book *Celebrities for Jesus*, makes the distinction between *fame*, a morally neutral state of being known by more people than you know, and *celebrity*, with its focus on self-promotion and brand-building. "The right kind of fame," she writes, "arises from a life well lived, not a brand well cultivated."

We're all, of course, aware of the rise and fall of many well-known celebrity pastors and preachers, who got about in their fancy cars, wearing trendy outfits, with their slick media team and an entourage of understudies. Celebrated and acclaimed while they were in public favour, they quickly became the focus of criticism and derision, by Christians and the secular world alike, when their true private lives became known and their moral failures and abuses were exposed.

Yet they are not alone in their blame. To some degree, we are all complicit in allowing this toxic celebrity culture to grow, unchecked, within the Church. We gave them their platform, we encouraged their rise to Christian stardom, and we promoted *their kind of Christianity* as somehow superior and more praiseworthy. And, by *their kind of Christianity* I mean, with our platform-centric churches and our consumer-driven services, we have not-so-subtly sent the message that anything worth saying must be said from a stage and that the ordinary faithfulness of regular Christians is, well, a little boring and not particularly noteworthy.

At its core, celebrity Christianity is about *pseudo-love* or *the feeling of love* that we get from Christian celebrities and which they, in turn, get from us. This degree of people worship is a disturbing tell, betraying the reality that we are, in many ways, a deeply narcissistic society, obsessed with and in love with self, more attracted to personality than character, more inspired by charisma than moral courage.

We have turned people into gods, worshipping the created rather than the Creator, looking to humans to satisfy us,

rather than turning to the One in whom we live and move and have our very being.

We all “feed celebrity by turning to famous people to meet our own social and emotional needs,” Katelyn Beaty comments.

## **Things We've Lost Under The Glare Of The Stage Lights**

With our eyes blinded by the bright lights of celebrity, perhaps we've forgotten some of the foundational truths of the Christian life; spiritual disciplines that faithful Christians have endeavoured to live out for centuries.

### **The call to ordinary faithfulness**

Fame doesn't necessarily come at the expense of faithfulness. Jesus, of course, was and still is one of the most famous men on the planet and yet would also be the supreme example of trust and confidence in God. But, by and large, the Christian life is not about notoriety but about quiet humility; taking up our cross daily, dying to self, and following Jesus wherever he leads.

This kind of faith rarely looks glamorous and is unlikely to make the daily news. More often than not, it goes largely unnoticed by all but One.

Maybe it's simply holding down two jobs in order to provide for your family and meet your financial responsibilities. Perhaps it's committing to authenticity and honesty in your relationships; business, friendship, community, church, romantic, and parental, choosing to make God at the heart and centre of your interactions. Maybe it's continuing to trust God, even through challenging and difficult circumstances like job loss, ill health, or relationship troubles. Maybe it's volunteering in service in your local church in steady and joyful commitment. Maybe it's doing the right thing, even (or

perhaps especially) when no one is looking. At all times it is, as Eugene Peterson puts it, *a long obedience in the same direction*; committed discipleship through worship, service, joy, work, happiness, humility, community, and blessing.

This is the kind of ordinary faithfulness that is, in fact, extraordinary; a Jesus-saturated culture that takes root and thrives in the lives of ordinary people, and which replicates in the lives of all those who come into contact with them.

## **The relevance of the local church**

This *long obedience in the same direction* – discipleship – is outworked primarily as part of a local church. As Jonathan Leeman puts it, *‘the local church enables the world to look upon the canvas of God’s people and see an authentic painting of Christ’s love and holiness. The local church lays down a pathway with guardrails and resting stations for the long journey of the Christian life.’*

Yet so many Christians only think of church as something they go to rather than something they identify as. They may describe themselves as Christian in a general sense, but feel no real connection to or fail to see the relevance of the local church and their participation in it.

Paul the Apostle speaks at length about the connection between the individual and the church. He comments in the book of Corinthians that “God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it”. This body of believers is governed or directed in all its functions by the head, who is Jesus. Through Christ’s work on the cross, Christians have been made his body, his family, his temple, his people, his flock, his joy and crown. But they only become these things collectively, never individually. The moment an individual becomes a Christian is the moment they *stop being merely* an individual Christian.

As author Rachel Held Evans comments, *“Christianity isn’t*



*meant to simply be believed; it's meant to be lived, shared, eaten, spoken, and enacted in the presence of other people. Try as I may, I can't be a Christian on my own. I need a community. I need the church."*

The relevance and significance of being part of a Christian community can not be overstated, yet global connection has, in many ways, increased local disconnection to the heart and soul of Christian life.

More important than which online pastors we follow, what podcasts we listen to, or what Christian books we buy, is the essential reality that every Christian needs to belong to a gospel-centred local church (if this is geographically possible, of course).

It's only by being part of the local church that we can participate in and contribute to the collective Christian activities that have marked the church as unique throughout the centuries; those of 'worship', 'fellowship', 'discipleship', ministry', and 'evangelism'.

## **The priesthood of every believer**

Under the old covenant made with the people of Israel, only one priest from a particular priestly family or class could enter into the Holy Place, approach the glory of God, and mediate between God and humanity as a representative of all the people.

All that changed because of Jesus. Through his reconciling work, the new covenant was instituted, where both Jew and Gentile could become part of God's family, where all people could draw near and find forgiveness and restoration of their relationship with God. The mediating work has been done, once, and for all time by the greatest of all priests, Jesus himself. Because believers become part of Jesus' body, part of the living temple of God, each one of us becomes an ambassador of this great ministry of reconciliation, people of the

kingdom, collectively, a 'holy nation', in essence, a *priesthood of every believer* (Exodus 19:6, 1 Peter 2:9)

The church is not some kind of class system or hierarchy, where only some minister and others merely watch on as spectators, but a collective organic reality, a *kingdom of priests*, in which every person witnesses and ministers, loves and serves alongside one another, as God has gifted them, for the good of the whole and the glory of His name.

There is more for each one of us to step into, and not merely as passive participants, but as active ambassadors in God's great story of reconciliation, members of the priesthood of every believer. Don't let celebrity culture tell you that you need a platform or notoriety or global influence in order to minister. You don't. You already know more than you need to know in order to do what you need to do. Simply make a start and get active in your church.

## **The sufficiency of Jesus**

What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

When we allow this truth to shine out of us, authentically and unvarnished, we discover, perhaps to our surprise, that Jesus is more than sufficient. His life-giving work on the cross, his selfless example of a life well lived, and his declaration of the sovereignty of God is more than powerful enough to transform the hardest of hearts. He doesn't need the lights, the cameras, the noise, the fancy clothes, the clever remarks, witty arguments, or public protestations of fervour.

He doesn't need any of it to impact a person's heart, to call them to himself, to transform and redeem them.

But the knowledge of this grace, of life-giving light, has

been entrusted to us as a treasure shining out of rough jars of clay. It's our responsibility and our privilege to let this light – *his light* – shine brightly, to point the world to him, and to believe in his sufficiency and power to save.

Anything we do, if it has any power at all, is only because it flows from a life saturated in God, Who is love itself, and empowered by His life-giving spirit,

Celebrity culture tells us we need to be more. Scripture tells us that God's power is made perfect in our weakness and that in that weakness, the sufficiency of Jesus is still more than enough.

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# When God Moved Into The Neighbourhood

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

## Glory, All-In-All

I think our view or perspective of God and His intentions may have been shaped by many things, but the Bible seems to set the narrative straight pretty much right away, declaring His intent and purpose from the beginning. We read in Genesis 1:6 that God said *“Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”* Further, God declares in Numbers 14:21 that *“the whole earth will be*

*filled with the glory of the LORD."*

God's desire has always been for us to be like Him and for Him to dwell with us, utterly and completely.

He intended us to not only be like Him but for us to also rule over His good creation on His behalf, exhibiting his justice, goodness, and truth throughout the earth. Affirming God's sovereignty, reflected in the way we choose to live like Him, gives shape and purpose to the role for which humanity was created (and, later in scripture, why and how [the church](#) also finds her purpose).

How amazing – the King of all the earth desired to make us in His image and in His likeness so that we might reflect His glory – the weight and splendour of all that He is, and so that everywhere one might look – east, west, north or south – all that can be seen and felt is God.

God dwelt with us once, long ago, in a garden. His glory and splendour could be seen then, as humanity and God walked together in perfect harmony and everything was *very good*. Only one thing remained in order to make this eternal; the application of our free will to partner with God and undertake this rule on His terms, a display of obedience and commitment to Him.

This isn't what the first humans choose, though, and the third chapter of Genesis starkly illustrates the terrible outcome; banishment from His presence and separation from His glory.

The book of Genesis is a means to a theological end; its purpose to illustrate in historical-mythological language God's relationship to creation and His intention of dwelling with us. *"The whole purpose of Genesis 1 is to set the ideal human community – a place in which the image of God, or the imitation of God, is actually going to be realised. That, of course, gets distorted in Genesis 3 when humans disobey God. But the first chapter is outlining the ideal."* (Professor C.

John Collins).

*Genesis 1–11, then, is the founding story of humanity, ending in crisis. These narratives give a real and true assessment of God's initial purposes and the human plight. Genesis 12–50 is the founding story of the nation with whom the covenant is eventually made at Sinai. The covenant establishes the relationship to Abraham and his descendants, provides the structure for living in God's presence, and lays the foundation for God's presence to be established on earth. – Biologos*

## **The Purpose Of Israel**

The people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, were the chosen people through whom God intended for all the world to learn of Him and be invited into a restored relationship with Him. After their epic deliverance from slavery in Egypt and a desperate flight through the Red Sea, the book of Exodus tells the story of Israel's journey under the leadership of Moses to Mount Sinai. There, they find its summit is wrapped in thick smoke and access to its base must be limited *because the Lord had descended on it in fire.*

Through rolling thunder and lightning, God makes solemn promises to them in that place. He intends to make of them a *"holy nation, and a kingdom of priests"*, contingent on their faithfulness to His covenant. He gives them ten commandments, so they might understand His holiness and His laws, by which their lives and worship of Him were to be governed. They will be witnesses to the nations around them of the glory and sovereignty of the God, who not only rules over them but also dwells with them.

It was also at Mount Sinai that *the tabernacle* – the *residence or dwelling place of God* was to be constructed. Designed to be able to be transported, it was to be a reminder

that God was with them always, dwelling in their midst and travelling with them throughout all their journeys. Housed within *the holiest of holies* inside the tabernacle would be *the ark of the covenant* – a pure, gold-covered wooden chest with an elaborate lid, ornamented with two golden cherubim, called *the mercy seat*. Inside the ark would be placed the *two stone tablets of the ten commandments*.

Swathed in an impermanent, transitory wrapping of tapestry curtains covered in images of cherubim, the glory of God descended and *tabernacled* amongst them. A large cloud of light and mist settled overhead, signaling God's presence was there in their midst. They would know it was time to set out when the cloud lifted but until then, they waited and rested in the presence of the Lord.

God had moved into the neighbourhood.

## **Solomon Builds A Temple**

The tabernacle was an itinerant dwelling place, as the people of Israel would be on the move, as it turns out, for 40 years. When they finally reached the end of their wilderness wanderings and settled in the promised land, it would be many more years before a permanent structure was built to welcome God's glory.

Under the reign of King Solomon the Wise, son of the great [King David](#), a glorious temple was constructed, some 480 years after the Great Exodus. Built with exquisite craftsmanship, using masterfully quarried stone blocks, and cedar and cyprus timbers from the great forests of Lebanon, it was a magnificent building dedicated to the God of Israel and intended as the place in which He would dwell with His people in a more permanent way.

Solomon's words at the dedication of the temple are beautifully moving to read:

*"I have built this Temple to honor the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And I have prepared a place there for the Ark, which contains the covenant that the LORD made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire community of Israel. He lifted his hands toward heaven, and he prayed, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in all of heaven above or on the earth below. You keep your covenant and show unfailing love to all who walk before you in wholehearted devotion. You have kept your promise to your servant David, my father. You made that promise with your own mouth, and with your own hands you have fulfilled it today. And now, O LORD, God of Israel, carry out the additional promise you made to your servant David, my father. For you said to him, 'If your descendants guard their behavior and faithfully follow me as you have done, one of them will always sit on the throne of Israel.' Now, O God of Israel, fulfill this promise to your servant David, my father. But will God really dwell on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"*

| 1 Kings 8:20-27, NLT

Solomon asks an important question. Will God really dwell on the earth, with us?

The answer is yes, but as humanity would come to understand, the living God desires to dwell not in temples made of wood and stone but in a living temple, in a structure softer and more pliable than stone, more ancient and beautiful than Solomon's temple or the wilderness tabernacle before that.

He longs to dwell *with us, in us*, utterly and completely.

The people of Israel, however, struggled with their unique and privileged identity. They would worship and serve God for a season and then, when things were going well, they would become complacent and selfish, turning aside to worship gods

made of wood and stone, like the nations around them. They abandoned their covenant with God, over and over again.

They paid little heed to the warnings from prophets like Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Ezekiel about the impending doom that would come upon Jerusalem, should they remain feckless and unfaithful.

Finally, Ezekiel is given a sobering vision of the end; of the moment that God's glory will leave the presence of His covenant people.

*“Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house, when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.” | Ezekiel 10:4-5, 18-19, 11:22-23*

## **The God Who Dwells With Us**

The nation of Israel had forgotten that God is not tethered to a building and His desire is not to dwell in a place, *but in a people.*



The final pages of the Old Testament come to a close with the prophetic words of Malachi, written around 460-430 BC. We find the people of Israel have now returned from nearly 130 years of exile and are back in the land of their ancestors. Yet the nation is vastly diminished. The temple has been restored under the leadership of Nehemiah but it is a much smaller building than the previous, gloriously constructed temple of King Solomon's days. Despite Ezekiel's later vision which seemed to offer the promise of God's presence (Ezekiel 43:2), the glory of the Lord has not returned to this temple.

Yet there is still hope to be found. Isaiah speaks these comforting words to Israel around the time of their return from exile in Babylon:

*"Comfort, comfort my people", says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." | Isaiah 40:1-5, ESV*

John the Baptist deliberately echoes these words, over 700 years later, to announce the arrival of Jesus Christ (found in John 1:1-18).

The gospel of John (the Apostle, not Baptist) opens with an otherworldly prologue regarding Jesus and his origins; specifically, the identification of Jesus as the Word, who was with God and was God in the beginning, through whom all things have been brought into being, who is the light and life of humanity, and who *became flesh and dwelt among us*.

He concludes his origin account with a brief explanation as to his role. "I am", he simply says "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord".

As author and theologian, Eugene H Peterson puts it (and where the title of this article is taken from), God had moved into the neighbourhood (Zechariah 2:10, John 1:14).

*"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish." | John 1:14*

## **God's Temple Is A Person**

The glory of the Lord had returned to dwell among His people. But this time it was wrapped in a perishable, temporary covering [of flesh and bone](#). This was the true temple of the living God, the house of God in which there are many rooms, and which, though it would be destroyed, would be rebuilt again in just three days, an eternal life-giving spirit for all who would enter in (John 2:19-21, John 14:2).

A temple with just a single door, larger on the inside than on the outside, where worshippers as numerous as the stars of heaven would find sacred space.

A place where people could fully enter instead of only just drawing near. A place where the dividing wall would be broken down and peace would be found instead of hostility. A place where there once had stood a wall, but now there would be a way; many brought near by the blood of Christ himself.

A place where people and God could meet, at last, face to face and be reunited.

A place where there once had been two, but now there would be one; humanity reborn in this holiest of places with God

dwelling utterly and completely in and with His people.

All the narratives of the Old Testament had been simply shadows and markers, one-dimensional illustrations intended to point the world to the real story God had been writing all along, to the reality that God had intended from the beginning. God would dwell, as He has always intended, among people, *in people*; in a kingdom of priests ransomed to Him by the precious blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

The glory of God dwelt among us, *tabernacled with us* in the person of Jesus Christ, God-With-Us, and it's in the truest of all temples – Jesus – that all things become possible.

He was all things; the presence of God dwelling fully with us, the glory of God in our midst, the way, the gate, the faithful shepherd, the life, the resurrection and victorious conqueror of death itself, our priest, our peace, the bright and morning star, and the true temple of the living God into whom we can fully enter, through the power of the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20).

*“Therefore, brethren, we have boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus.” | Hebrews 10:19, Weymouth*

*For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” | Ephesians 2:18-22, ESV*

# Worthy To Enter Into Glory

It's strange – the more I read the Bible, the more complex it seems, and yet the simpler it becomes. Sure, it's full of strange visions and obscure prophecies, lamentations and poetry, passages offering wisdom for life, and chapters delving into deep theological insights about God and humanity.

Reading the vivid and apocalyptic language of Revelation, for example, stirs our blood while immersing ourselves in the trials and tribulations of faithful Job pulls at our hearts.

The Bible is a completely magnificent book, the traverse of which is the journey of a lifetime.

But there really is only one take-home point in all of it. God wants to *dwell with us*, all-in-all, utterly and completely, in glory.

It's what we were created for, yet humanity, left to ourselves, is unable to echo God's holiness, His perfection, His righteousness, and His supreme goodness. The nation of Israel, first specifically chosen to be God's people, showed the truth of this. Their faithless, inconsistent example and half-hearted desire for God are a reflection of all humanity.

We could never enter into God's temple, into the very presence of His glory without help. And Jesus was sent to be that help, to make a way, to break down the wall, to bring us back to God. Holy, innocent, unstained and exalted above the heavens, he is the guarantor of a superior covenant; both the presence, the pardon, and the promise of God.

*Jesus makes everything possible.*

All of scripture, in a million different ways, is simply telling us the truth of this; that in Jesus, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

And *that* is a story worth telling.

*“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” | Hebrews 10:19-25, ESV*

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The Pauline epistles are just brimming with thoughts on this subject, too numerous to comment on here. I'm conscious I've only just scratched the surface and hope I have managed to do it some small justice. If you're looking to soak a little longer in these thoughts, I'd recommend heading on over to the book of Hebrews and starting there with a read-through of chapters 1-10...

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# **A Guide For LGBTQ+ Christian**

# Teens

Are you a Christian teen struggling with or feeling confused by LGBTQ+ and gender identity issues? Then this is a conversation we need to have...

First of all, know this. You are loved.

The God of all the Universe, the One in whose image you're made loves *you*. He knows you; your innermost fears, your deepest insecurities, and your hopes and dreams for the future. He has counted every hair on your head.

This is the same God who can count the stars by name, who has caused worlds to come into being, and who has decided that no two snowflakes should be the same.

This God is interested in *knowing* and *being known* by you.

There's a beautiful little verse in the gospel of Matthew that tells us just how much God cares for us. In Matthew 6, Jesus says to the listening crowds:

*"Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth much more than birds?" | Matthew 6:26 CEV*

God cares *for* us and He cares *about* us.

You are of infinite worth to God.

Know this too, He is not astonished by your mistakes. He's not surprised by your fears or doubts and He isn't shocked by the things you've done wrong. There's nothing you've done that He hasn't already seen coming, that He hasn't accounted for, or that He hasn't already prepared a way through. Your best moments and your worst moments are all known to him.

In fact, he knows exactly how it feels to be human because His Son Jesus became human, just like us. He experienced all that we do; the pressure to conform, the criticism of peers, the rejection of friends, the pull of temptation, the pain of betrayal. He knows and he understands.

You are not alone.

## **You Might Be Wondering...**

Why am I here? What on earth is the point of humanity?

This is a great question and it's really one of life's most basic questions: what is the purpose of human existence?

Well, we're all here for a reason and it starts with God.

God has a plan. I know it sounds a bit cliched but, He really does.

He intends to fill the earth with His glory, with all the amazing attributes and characteristics of Who He is; love, kindness, justice, peace, holiness, beauty... Basically, a perfect, incredible, amazing space, probably better than anything we can really get our heads around! And humanity was created to be a part of this plan; not just as a minor detail but as major character.

Humanity was created to rule over this world and all the creatures that live in it wisely and well, as God's image-bearers. Being an image bearer of God means that when you look at a person, you see God. And, in a collective sense, when you look at humanity, you see God. You see His character, His values, His glory, His holiness; everything about Him. He's the king of everything and we get to represent Him in this good, good world!

Part of this plan specifically involved the creation of male and female, [a gender binary](#) that many people today are

rejecting. Yet this is exactly how God designed humanity, it is a foundational part of each of our identities, and, collectively, it's how humanity reflects the completeness of God's image. When men and women (male and female) come together in one, extraordinary collective, we are the complete image of all that God Himself is. Isn't that incredible?

## **LGBTQ+, The Gender Binary + More...**

You might be struggling with the idea of [a gender binary of male and female](#). You may feel at odds with your body; unhappy or discomforted by your physical appearance, or challenged by how your body is changing, without your 'agreement' or 'permission'. You might be surprised at what you look like or sound like, or maybe at how differently people start to treat you. You might feel like you don't even recognise yourself when you look in the mirror.

All this is normal, and ok, *and you will be ok.*

You are transitioning, *as you have been designed to do*, from a child to an adult to becoming a functional and fully-formed man or woman. This is one of life's great crossings, a time of new discovery and development, but also of great upheaval and emotional angst, and it can be a really tough space.

It's ok to feel a bit out of your depth, super cranky with your parents or siblings, or all jumbled up and unsure of who.you.really.are.

Think about this for a minute; when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, it's totally mushed up, taken apart, and reorganised into the beautiful insect that finally emerges. It shouldn't really surprise us that moving from young, dependent children to fully independent adults can feel a bit like this process.

You will feel *a lot of feels*. And while our feelings are real, and they often provide important signals about what is going



on in our world, we need to know that *they're not always reliable*. Feelings *alone* are not adequate markers of what might be true.

So it's really important to not rely on *our feelings alone* but to take other things into account as well. These might be things like wise guidance or advice from people we know and trust, and who we know love us, applying a healthy dose of critical thinking to our decision-making and the values we want for our life, and, most importantly, the truths found in God's word and what He has to say about us.

It's really important, particularly during times of transition and change, to remind yourself that you are deeply known and loved by God, even when you feel like you don't know yourself. You have been created with intention and purpose, and God has a hope and a future planned for you. He has taken care of you and he will continue to take care of you, through your good times and (especially) in your bad times. You can take anything to Him and you can ask Him for guidance and help, through prayer and through reading His word. You can trust Him.

Remind yourself, if you are a female, that you have been gifted with unique and diverse qualities, specific to your sex. This is intentional, beautiful, and life-affirming. You are on your way to becoming a woman, with all the inherent and amazing attributes that God has designed for you. It might feel a little scary, a lot unknown, but you can trust that God knows what He's doing.

If you are a male, remind yourself that you have been gifted with unique and diverse qualities, specific to your sex. This is intentional, incredible, and life-affirming. You're becoming a man, with the opportunity to contribute your incredible characteristics and attributes to the purpose of God, as He has intended for you. You might feel overwhelmed, and more than a bit nervous but you, too, can trust that God

knows what He's doing.

(And, just a little note here: one gender isn't better than the other, and neither is complete without the other. We need both men and women to truly image God in this world, as He intended!)

*"It is out of the diversity and distinctive separateness of male and female that we humans are called to not only reflect the image and likeness of God, but we also represent God in the stewardship of His good and wonderful creation." (Genesis 1:28-29). | [Focus On The Family](#)*

## Let's Talk About Sex

You, or somebody you know, might be baffled by a (sudden and new) attraction to someone of the same sex, attraction to people of both sexes, or maybe just confused and overwhelmed by sexuality in general. This is often new and surprising territory for us all when we arrive here.

I want you to know that it's normal to feel these struggles and perhaps even experience confusion and emotional overwhelm. It's actually very common for teens to be attracted to or have sexual thoughts about people of the same sex and/or the opposite sex; it's often part of the emotional and physical changes that humans go through as they mature into adulthood.

The Bible tells us that sex is amazing, that it's been designed by God for the flourishing of humanity, and that it's part of His good creation. You only have to read the [Song of Solomon](#) to realise the Bible isn't shy about talking about sex (some of those passages are certainly blush-inducing!) But, as with everything, sex has been designed for a purpose and to be experienced within boundaries, with our good in mind.

What you need to know is that God has designed sex to be experienced by a man and woman, within the boundaries of a

committed, life-long relationship (marriage). This kind of committed sex with a life-long partner provides physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy, and is the foundation for a secure and stable family unit, into which children may be born.

Part of the original intention for humanity in Genesis was 'to be fruitful and multiply' (to have children) and to fill the earth with humans who will all bear God's image. To this end, God created one man for one woman (Adam and Eve) and they were brought together in the union of marriage, giving us the blueprint for healthy and flourishing sexual intimacy.

The bond that is created between a man and a woman in marriage and, particularly, in their physical unity, is a mirror of the character of God, in all its completeness. (The Bible also tells us in the New Testament that marriage is a symbol of Jesus and the church, who is called 'his bride').

God never intended for sex to be experienced by two women together, or by two men together, or outside of the committed, life-long relationship of marriage. Again, this is very counter-cultural to what you might hear around you, what you think your feelings are telling you, or even what your friends might believe. But this is the Bible's truth about sex, and this is God's will for humanity, in order that we (humanity) will flourish.

If you're a teen struggling with your sexuality or a teen trying to maintain God's will in relation to sex (abstinence), please know you are not alone! It's really important that you find people you can trust, who can pray with you, who can encourage you in pursuing God's will for you, for your good and for your flourishing, and that you understand, too, that even when we mess up, God can still forgive us and help us get back on track (more on this in a minute).

You might find [this online message](#) by Ps Mark Lohman, from [The](#)

[Bridge Church \(in the Chino Valley, California\)](#), on 'The Gospel & Sex' super helpful, and, if this is an area you're struggling in and would like some Christian advice and guidance on, I'd really encourage you to have a watch.

## Getting Back On Track (Why We Need Jesus)

Being an image bearer of God means that when you look at a person, you see God. And, in a collective sense, when you look at humanity, you see God.

Well, at least, that's what was meant to happen.

Adam and Eve really put a spanner in the works on that one. You've probably heard the story; a garden, a snake, 'don't eat from a certain tree', a lie, disobedience, sin, punishment, death... It all gets pretty grim, right from the get-go.

And so even though we're made to image God, to be a significant part of His plan, and even though we were created with all the capability and purpose to do this, it gets messed up pretty quickly. The introduction of sin into the world brings about terrible consequences for not just Adama and Eve but for all creation. We live in a fallen world, with the echoes of our intended greatness all around us, but now subject to decay, death, and, in a lot of cases, hopelessness and despair.

But this is how much God loves you, how much He loves me, how much He loves *us*, His creation. *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

God sent His son to die for us! To fix up the issue of sin, to make a way for us to be forgiven for our mistakes, and to show us the way to live in right relationship with Him. He sent Jesus to save us, to redirect our lives towards His good and abundant way of living, and to help us see that our true reality, who we *really are*, is *one beloved of God*, intended for glory and greatness.

Every other identity – and the world around us has plenty of ‘identities’ on offer – are false and shallow copies of our true identity; a human made in God’s image, intended to reveal His character and glory, and who, in Jesus, can find forgiveness and restoration and become empowered to live this purpose fully.

*“God loved the people of this world so much that he gave His only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them!” | John 3:16-17, CEV*

God already knew how messed up we all are, He already knew the kinds of bad things we’d do, in fact, He’s already seen all the bad things you’ll ever do...and yet He still sent Jesus to die for you!

We all need Jesus. There’s not a single person who hasn’t done something wrong, who hasn’t made a choice or taken an action that wasn’t outside of God’s ideal, who doesn’t need Jesus to get back on track. Jesus gives us hope and a future, belonging, homecoming, and the opportunity *to be fully known and truly loved.*

## **An Invitation And A Challenge**

One of the first things Jesus told people when he began his preaching ministry was *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

It was both an invitation and a challenge to the people then, and it’s no less an invitation and challenge for you today, a 21st-century teen.

Will you turn away from your willfulness, from governing your own life without God’s guidance, your persistence in trying to find identity in shallow and dissatisfying deceptions, and

will you turn to the maker and creator of all things, the One in whose image you're created and with whom you have been intended to experience eternal and satisfying relationship?

God's story – the one written in the stars and carried on the wind – is the story of who each one of us was intended to be. It's a story that confirms we were made for more than just this life, that we're meant to be part of something greater, something eternal.

It's a story of promise; of *knowing and being known*, of being *fully and completely alive*, and this is what following Jesus is all about.

**Maybe you've never thought about following Jesus? Or maybe you *have* been thinking about following him and becoming a Christian, but just aren't sure how to take that step. That's a topic I intend to talk about more in my [next article](#) in this series (Letters To My Kids) so look out for that soon!**

**In the meantime, I'd love to hear from you. Let me know your thoughts on this topic (you can message me publicly or privately here or on my socials), or any questions you'd like answers to on this topic (or anything else) in upcoming articles!**

*“Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.” Psalm 5:12, NIV*

*Lord, I ask that You will rescue, guide, and protect our teens today. Answer them when they call on You, and be with them in times of trouble. I know that Your plans for them are good, and not for their harm. Guard and protect them with Your favor as with a shield (Psalm 5:12). Amen.” | [Prayers For Teens](#)*

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# Sex + Gender

The world is not the same place it once was.

Certainty has given way to subjective reality. Truth can no longer be pinned down. Common sense doesn't seem quite so common after all.

At times, it feels like the whole world has gone mad.

And perhaps we have...

One of the biggest conversations of our time is the gender/sexuality\* debate. It used to be that gender, now a contested term, and sex were largely synonymous. If your sex or gender was 'male' then you were a man. If your sex or gender was 'female', then you were a woman.

Certainly, more is perhaps encompassed in the use of the descriptor 'man' rather than just 'male' (or 'woman' rather than just 'female'), binary terms which refer to a human's sexuality (gender, not 'orientation'), but these terms are nonetheless indelibly connected to one another, two aspects of the same reality.

Historically, most societies have recognised only two distinct genders, a binary of masculine and feminine largely corresponding to the biological sexes of male and female. Simply put, if you had an X and a Y chromosome, you were a male human. Two XXs and you were a female human. Immature undeveloped humans were called boys and girls, respectively. Mature, fully developed humans, were called men and women.

The discovery of sex differentiation chromosomes is a relatively new science but its discovery in 1905 only

confirmed what humans [had believed and understood for millennia.1](#)

*“During the first decade of the 20th century, it was established that the sex of almost all many-celled biological organisms is determined at the moment of fertilisation by the combination of two kinds of microscopic entities, the X and Y chromosomes. This discovery was the culmination of more than two thousand years of speculation and experiment of how an animal, plant, or human becomes male or female.” | [Nettie N Stevens And The Discovery Of Sex Determination By Chromosomes.](#)*

## The Human Genome

This XY sex-determination system is shared by humans, many mammals, insects, and other animals. The perpetuation and reproduction of many species, humans included, is a result of the combining of the chromosomes from one X individual and one Y individual. Humans have forty-six chromosomes (including the two sex chromosomes, XX in females and XY in males), 23 of which are inherited from an individual's father (a male), with the other 23 inherited from an individual's mother (a female).

Our sex chromosomes form only part of the approximately three billion base pairs of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that make up the entire set of chromosomes of the human organism. One of the most significant and ambitious scientific endeavours of our time has been the sequencing of this entire set of chromosomes – the human genome, a project which was begun in 1990 and which, by 2022, had produced the first truly complete human genome sequence.

*The [objective2 of this project](#) was ‘to decode the human hereditary information (human blueprint) that determines all individual traits inherited from parents.’ Dr Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, and one of the*



*world's leading scientists, has long worked at the cutting edge of the science of DNA, which he describes as 'the language of God'. He argues that science and God are in harmony – that, indeed, science is of God, and that the sequencing of the human genome 'was both a stunning scientific achievement and an occasion of worship'.*

The sequencing of the human genome only confirmed what many have long believed; that we are *'fearfully and wonderfully made'* (Psalm 139:14). Humanity has been created and brought into being by an intelligent designer, who has carefully constructed the complex genetic material that makes up a complete human, with the ability for that human to replicate and reproduce *in his or her own likeness*. We are not an accident, a vague collection of random cells which have collided together, but a highly complex sequence of chromosomes that have formed a complete human, with a soul, intellect, morals, capability, and purpose.

In fact, the Bible comments in its earliest chapters that we are *made in God's image*. We are unique in all of creation because *we are made like God*. *Who we are* is directly connected to *the One who created us*.

## **The Emperor Has No Clothes On**

Post-modern ideology would try to tell us that there are (currently) 57 genders. Gender, it's claimed, is not something we *are* but something that we *feel*. Not only that, gender is something that is fluid, an experience that can remain static or be in constant flux. Today we may *feel* female. Tomorrow we may *feel* male. Next week, we may *feel somewhere in the middle* or possibly *both at the same time*.

But, we're also told, gender is somehow some kind of social construct, that our gender *is expressed through the roles we take on*, the *expectations placed on us*, *our relationship with*

*others, and the complex ways that gender is institutionalised in society. Gender – how we feel and who we know ourselves to be – is unrelated to our biological and physical realities, that is, our sex and our gender are not the same thing.*

The historical recognition of two genders – male and female (called the gender binary) is usually based on someone's anatomy (the genitals they were born with), but, we're being told, these markers are unreliable as to the *true person's self* (or gender) which emerges with time (or is forced upon them by society), and which may or may not *match [the gender they were assigned at birth](#)*.<sup>3</sup>

(At this point, I'm looking around, wondering, *when is someone going to tell the Emperor he has no clothes on?*)

We are more than just our genitals, this is true. But these outward markers are only part of a complex series of chemical reactions that were set in motion the moment that fertilisation took place, the moment that *we began*, and the unique individual that would eventually become *us* sparked into reality. This sex determination, which will include all the physical, emotional, and psychological traits we will uniquely possess happens during fertilisation, and *it doesn't change during the pregnancy*.

*“All human individuals—whether they have an XX, an XY, or an atypical sex chromosome combination—begin development from the same starting point. During early development the gonads of the fetus remain undifferentiated; that is, all fetal genitalia are the same and are phenotypically female. After approximately 6 to 7 weeks of gestation, however, the expression of a gene on the Y chromosome induces changes that result in the development of the testes. Thus, this gene is singularly important in inducing testis development. The production of testosterone at about 9 weeks of gestation results in the development of the reproductive tract and the masculinisation (the normal development of male sex*

*characteristics) of the brain and genitalia. In contrast to the role of the fetal testis in differentiation of a male genital tract and external genitalia in utero, fetal ovarian secretions are not required for female sex differentiation. As these details point out, the basic differences between the sexes begin in the womb.” | [National Library Of Medicine](#)*

We are not merely male or female because our bodies say so, we are male or female because our brains also say so; neurochemically distinct from one another as either ‘male’ or ‘female’ brains. While similar in many basic ways, male and female brains show consistent differences that have important implications for each sex. Our sex (most commonly observed and confirmed by our exterior genitalia at birth) and our gender – whether we are male or female – are one and the same, and this differentiation shows up time and time again in the way we think and behave.

Diane Halpern, PhD, and past president of the American Psychological Association, comments that *“there is simply too much data pointing to the biological basis of sex-based cognitive differences to ignore.”* She references a catalogue of human behavioural differences that have been [studied and observed](#)<sup>4</sup>:

*“Women excel in several measures of verbal ability – pretty much all of them, except for verbal analogies. Women’s reading comprehension and writing ability consistently exceed that of men, on average. They outperform men in tests of fine-motor coordination and perceptual speed. They’re more adept at retrieving information from long-term memory. Men, on average, can more easily juggle items in working memory. They have superior visuospatial skills: They’re better at visualising what happens when a complicated two- or three-dimensional shape is rotated in space, at correctly determining angles from the horizontal, at tracking moving objects and at aiming projectiles.” | [Stanford Medicine](#)*

## Magazine

Halpen concludes; *“new technologies have generated a growing pile of evidence that there are inherent differences in how men’s and women’s brains are wired and how they work and many of these cognitive differences appear quite early in life.”*

This process of sex differentiation, begun at fertilisation, continues throughout our life, influencing our physical and mental growth and development (bone structure, weight, height, genitalia, brain, and characteristics). The complex process encoded in our DNA resolutely follows the invisible instructions given at fertilisation, and, barring abnormality or mutation, results, without fail, in a *gender or sex that matches our physicality.*

*The **gender/sex of a person** is the final result of unique genetic, hormonal, and morphologic sex-differentiation at fertilisation. It is fixed and it is binary, either male or female.*

Your shy sensitive son isn’t *a girl trapped in a boy’s body*, he’s simply a shy, sensitive *boy*. Your boisterous, energetic, sandpit-loving daughter isn’t *a boy trapped in a girl’s body*, she’s simply an energetic, outdoor-loving *girl*.

While our sex/gender may be fixed and binary, our unique personalities and characteristics are not. Our identity is not the same as any other person on the earth. Even identical twins are not truly 100% identical, with a complex interaction between our genes, our environment, and our epigenetic markers uniquely shaping who we are.

We are truly, each one of us, one-of-a-kind.

Historical gender roles may have played a large part in the troubling place where we now find ourselves as a culture, insisting that all men must behave in certain ways and perform

certain roles (outdoorsy, tough, adventurous..) and, conversely, that all women must behave in certain ways (deferring and submissive, domestic, delicate) (another day, another blog, although I tackle some of this in relation to healthy church function in my article '[Stop Promoting Gendered Hierarchy!](#)').

However, I think a large part of what has contributed to the madness surrounding sex and gender conversations today is the abandonment of the idea of *God*, an intelligent, thoughtful designer who *insists we were created for a purpose*.

## What Is A Woman?

One of the most startling, and troubling documentaries in recent times is a project undertaken by Matt Walsh, an American Christian conservative and political commentator. In his documentary, "[What Is A Woman](#)"<sup>5</sup>, Walsh asks questions that many people no longer seem willing to answer.

Can a *woman* be defined? (historically, a woman was defined as *an adult human female*). Is being a woman simply *a feeling* or *behaving a certain way*? Can a woman be *trapped in a man's body*? Does *being a woman* mean anything at all?

In the documentary, Walsh visits a women's march, where placards are lifted high, campaigning *for the rights of women*. Unfortunately, nobody seems able to define what a woman actually is, reducing the impetus of the march to nothing more than a ridiculous farce. Implausibly, many of those he interviews in his documentary seem 'uncomfortable with his line of questioning', deeming his tone 'malignant and harmful'.

The prevailing (or, at least, the most vocal) narrative at play is built on a serious and disturbing detachment from subjective reality. If being a woman is *simply how one feels on any given day*, then being a woman can include everyone and

no one. It's no kind of definition at all.

Gender and sex are no longer something that people are willing to define. Forget science, forget biology; how any one person *feels* is the prevailing truth of the day. And if you have a difference of opinion in relation to the gender + sex conversation, if you even dare to ask questions, you are deemed hateful, phobic, violent, or discriminatory.

As one person interviewed in the documentary comments, "*If you speak up about it ... your life will be over in some way*". Defy the trans groupthink and face profound consequences.

*Walsh's long-ranging interview with a gender studies professor finds the star drilling down on a basic principle. Truth. [emphasis mine] One therapist asks, with a straight face, "whose truth are we talking about?" | [Hollywood Into To](#)*

## What Is Truth?

*Truth.*

A hot-button topic, to say the least.

And *truth*, it seems, is at the core of the issues we are facing in relation to gender, sexuality, and identity.

Most human activities depend upon the concept of 'truth' as an objective reality, including most of the sciences, law, journalism, and, indeed, elements of everyday life. As Sir Isaac Newton discovered, if you throw an apple up in the air, it (or anything else) will invariably come down. The old adage, '*what goes up must come down*' is attributed to his discovery of this undeniable truth. The science behind this, is, of course, the law of gravity, one of three 'laws of motion' that Sir Isaac Newton formulated.

I have deliberately avoided overly referencing the Bible up until this point, endeavoring instead to defer firstly to

science and reason (who are, in reality, both friends of faith) in my initial comments. But humanity has been long discussing the question, "*what is truth?*" and Jesus himself gave an answer to this question when it was put to him, circa AD33. He replied, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6)

Jesus claimed (and the Bible is in agreement) that truth is not subjective, just some abstract exchanging of philosophical ideas, but rather objective, rooted in the person of God, who has been revealed to us in Christ. Paul the Apostle comments in his letter to the church at Colosse in the early first century that every truthful thing in the universe is found in Christ as the Word, Wisdom and Knowledge belonging to God Himself. Everything that was created was through and for him, he existed before anything else and he holds all things together. (Colossians 1:16-17, Colossians 2:3)

For many, the Bible may seem outdated, irrelevant, out of touch, or even downright dangerous. And I can understand this. The Bible has been misused, misinterpreted, and misunderstood throughout history, often used to control and harm rather than heal and liberate.

The reality, however, is that the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God Himself, whereby He has revealed Himself to His creation and through which we are able to understand His intentions. It offers life-giving wisdom, leads humanity to salvation, and provides meaning and purpose for our human existence. In fact, the Bible is the expression of God Himself, who is *all about justice, redemption, and liberation* (and who is utterly opposed to injustice and evil).

As such, the implication is that it is entirely sufficient to answer all our tricky and troubling questions, and, because its author is God, those answers can be relied upon to be true. (I've written more about the accuracy, authority, and authenticity of the Bible [here](#)).

Let's suppose for a minute that the Bible really does have the answers to all our human problems, issues, doubts, and questions. Does the Bible have anything to say about gender and sex? What truths does God communicate to us about these issues?

## Made In God's Image | Imago Dei

*God is The Subject Of Life. The Centre Of Everything. The story of humanity starts with Him and ends with Him.*

As I commented earlier in this article, we (humanity) are unique in all of creation because *we are made like God. Who we are is directly connected to the One who created us.* This belief formed one of the key cornerstones of the early Christian faith and, in many respects, set Christianity apart from other religions of its time; that is, the belief in the intrinsic value and worth of every human *because they're made in God's image.*

Science tells us *how* we're (uniquely and intricately) made (and I've talked about that earlier in this article) but faith tells us *why* (what we're here for and what life is all about). Scripture intends us to understand that we were created intentionally and with a specific purpose in mind; to be God's image-bearers – *imago dei* – on the earth, and to rule it wisely and well on His behalf. Nothing about our creation was accidental, and nothing was left to chance.

One of the first things that the book of Genesis confirms, alongside the commission for which we were created, is the binary nature of our humanity:

*So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; **male** and **female** He created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the*



*ground.” Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.” | Genesis 1:27-30, NLT*

The narrative of humanity’s creation is further fleshed out in Genesis chapter 2 with our gender binary of male and female being connected to our naming as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. (Genesis 2:18-25) (Interestingly, we are also given the blueprint for marriage in this chapter; that is, a committed and exclusive relationship between a man and a woman).

Jesus himself confirms his belief in and understanding of the creation narrative (when discussing the legality of divorce) in Matthew 19: 4-8, where he says, *“Haven’t you read the Scriptures? They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’”*

The differences between the two genders are unique and distinctive, both designed by God with a purpose in mind. Both genders are intrinsically valuable and precious to God, and we see His characteristics displayed by the perfect merging of both masculine and feminine traits. These distinct genders are the fundamental building blocks of God’s creation and are part of God’s plan for His creation.

God’s original design for humanity was built on equality, cooperation, respect, commitment, and support, with both genders bringing unique and valued differences to the partnership. This mutuality, this joint responsibility, forms part of the great narrative of restoration and redemption that Jesus himself came to inaugurate when he ushered in *the kingdom of God*. Part of this reality includes the binary of

our respective genders, that of male and female (man and woman); deeply embedded into our DNA, the very building blocks that make us *us*.

The Bible insists that we were created for a purpose. It insists that there are two genders; male and female. And it names these genders; man and woman.

*“The physical, human body has great significance within Christian understanding, from creation through incarnation to the resurrection and ascension. The Bible recognises and celebrates two sexes. The text does not seem to allow for, and actually on occasion prohibits, identifying as different from your biological birth sex. That said, we need to understand what the Bible means when it says we are made “male and female” and not unwittingly accept society’s stereotypes about sex and gender.” | [Premier Christianity](#)*

## **Responding Pastorally**

Unfortunately, for some individuals, gender identity disorder is very real. People with gender dysphoria genuinely have a deep sense of unease and distress at the perception their biological sex/gender does not match who they *feel* they are.

Sensitivity and compassion are crucial in engaging with and in these conversations.

(Additionally, there *are* individuals born with genetic anomalies (sex chromosomes, gonads, and genitalia) which don’t conform to the usual binary of male/female. Known as [intersex\\*\\*](#), the prevalence of such occurrences is thought to be about 0.018% of the population. People with abnormalities of development should be helped to find their place as they see it best, and it’s not the intention of this article to discuss those particular cases in any detail.)<sup>6</sup>

Yet the statistics would suggest that the reportable numbers

of those suffering from gender dysphoria are between 0.002% and 0.005% of the population, actually a very small number. It goes no way towards explaining the absolute explosion that seems to have happened in recent years, as young children and teens are diagnosed as transgender, rushed into hormone treatments, and, more drastically, undergoing life-altering surgeries.

This is such a difficult issue for families to navigate today. Many of us can feel out of our depth engaging in conversations that use terms and language that have shifted so dramatically from historically accepted definitions.

More seriously, parents are being told that failure to affirm a child who may be suffering from gender dysphoria could result in, worst case scenario, suicide and, in a recent amendment to the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 in Victoria, Australia, non-endorsement by parents of a child who wishes to transition [is considered emotional and psychological abuse \(ie family violence\)](#).<sup>7</sup>

Yet the reality is that affirming a person's belief (they are the opposite gender to that which they were "assigned" at birth), or advocating the use of hormonal or surgical intervention actually does nothing to truly resolve the issue. As Ryan T Anderson, PhD [comments](#), "Sex "reassignment" doesn't work. It's impossible to "reassign" someone's sex physically [because sex isn't something that is "assigned at birth"], and attempting to do so doesn't produce good outcomes psychosocially."

*"Cosmetic surgery and cross-sex hormones can't change us into the opposite sex. They can affect appearances. They can stunt or damage some outward expressions of our reproductive organisation. But they can't transform it. They can't turn us from one sex into the other. Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men. All become feminised men or masculinized women, counterfeits or*

*impersonators of the sex with which they 'identify.' In that lies their problematic future." | [The Heritage Foundation](#)*

Carving up bodies and dishing out synthetic hormones is not the answer. Speaking hope and truth into people's lives is.

"Our minds and senses function properly when they reveal reality to us and lead us to knowledge of truth. And we flourish as human beings when we embrace the truth and live in accordance with it. A person might find some emotional relief in embracing a falsehood, but doing so would not make him or her objectively better off. Living by a falsehood keeps us from flourishing fully, whether or not it also causes distress." (The Heritage Foundation)

John Whitehall, Professor of Paediatrics at Western Sydney University, comments, "People are not interested in discussing the science. We've all got to believe that there's no such thing as a boy or a girl, that we're all somewhere in between. I don't believe that. The good news is that in all the major articles, these children (who may be confused about their gender) will revert to the natal sex through puberty. What we should do then is have confidence in the statistics **and not mess the child up along the way.**"

## **A Final Word**

Truth. The final word in all of this is truth.

Truth spoken with compassion and care, with sensitivity and love, but truth nonetheless. Encouraging a false narrative will do no one any favours.

We need to confidentially speak what is true in relation to sex and gender, affirming reality, and encouraging acceptance of our physical being, understanding our embodied selves as male or female. Narratives that disguise or distort reality are misguided and do not actually result in human flourishing

or wholeness.

It's not only untruthful to affirm these distortions, it's unloving and harmful to the individual. The most beneficial therapies focus on helping people accept themselves and live in harmony with their bodies.

And I would argue that nothing is more healing than being able to define yourself as one beloved of God, created with purpose (holistically male or female), and that this reality – that you are a child of God – is your true identity. This is the truth that the world needs to hear, the hope that it needs for whole and healthy flourishing, and the reality that we need to be affirming, with love and compassion.

*“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” Psalm 139:13-16, NLT*

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1 .

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/230427#:~:text=According%20to%20most%20biologists%20and,Wilson%20\(1856%2D1939\).](https://www.jstor.org/stable/230427#:~:text=According%20to%20most%20biologists%20and,Wilson%20(1856%2D1939).)

2 .

<https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/educational-resources/fact-sheets/human-genome-project>

3 .

<https://teentalk.ca/learn-about/gender-identity/#:~:text=There%20are%20many%20different%20gender,or%20a%20combination%20of%20these.>

4.

<https://stanmed.stanford.edu/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different/>

5. <https://whatisawoman.com>

6. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001669.htm>

7.

<https://www.hrla.org.au/not-affirming-transgender-children-is-family-violence-in-victoria>

8.

<https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/sex-reassignment-doesnt-work-here-the-evidence>

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**\*Historically, 'gender' and 'sex' are words used to describe and define the anatomical and physiological differences between men and women. Modern terminology uses 'sex' to refer to biological characteristics and 'gender' to refer to the individual's and society's perceptions of sexuality, identity, and the concepts of masculinity and femininity. This article is using 'gender' and 'sex', as defined in the historical sense.**

**This article is not intended to be offensive or divisive in nature, but rather to open a channel of respectful conversation about a subject that is deeply important to many people. I do not encourage discrimination, hate-speech, or sexism towards anyone, at any time, but, particularly in this instance, towards anyone who does not share this point of view.**

**\*\*This article also purposely does not address or discuss the issues surrounding chromosomal abnormalities or intersex conditions.**

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# The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

The sovereignty and rule of God has always existed and will always exist ([Psalm 47:7](#), [1 Chronicles 29:11](#), [Exodus 15:18](#), [Psalm 103:19](#)).

He is Almighty God, maker of the earth, sovereign over all, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He alone claims the title of the One and Only God and that there is none like Him in all the earth. The Psalmist declares the wonder and worthiness of this Eternal God, who is clothed in light, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, and who walks on the waves of the sea (Psalm 104:2, Job 9:8). All of creation bows in obeisance to His majesty, for all things owe their existence to Him (Psalm 104:30, Psalm 6:4, Psalm 96:11, Luke 19:40).

He is the God of promise, at whose Word the universe came into being and whose Word will never return to Him void, not accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent (Genesis 1:3, Isaiah 55:11). His loving devotion endures forever. He is faithful, true, just, and all glorious (Psalm 136:3, 1 Timothy 1:17).

His sovereignty is over and above all other kingdoms and His rule absolute (Isaiah 37:16, 1 Timothy 6:15). All the earth is His and everything that is therein (Psalm 24:1). This glorious and absolute rule and reign of the only wise and faithful King is what the New Testament terms the '*kingdom of God*'.

## In The Beginning

This is the reality of the story in the beginning. Affirming God's sovereignty gives shape and purpose to the role for

which humanity was created, that is, to rule wisely and well on behalf of earth's Sovereign.

*"Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." | Genesis 1:26, CSB*

*"Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD." | Numbers 14:21, ESV*

Adam and Eve were given the authority and privilege of ruling over God's good creation, filling all the earth with His glory and accomplishing His purpose (Genesis 1:26). However, instead of partnering with God, they choose to undertake this rule on their own terms, enacting their own will instead of the will of the Eternal One.

As a result, they experienced disruption in their relationship with the King, and the consequence of their disobedience was catastrophic. The evil of sin entered God's good world, and would eventually spread like a dark, cancerous mass across the surface of the earth, setting in motion the destructive cycle the world has been subject to ever since.

Another kingdom was willed into existence, the kingdom of this world; earthly, transient, and dispensing death instead of life. It's ruled over by the spirit of corruption; where envy, murder, anger, and strife find footing and flourish. It's a dominion of darkness, from which there is no escape.

Every human is born into this kingdom, enslaved to the ruler of this world. We're born physically alive but spiritually dead. Without our spiritual connection to the King of all the earth, we're nothing more than 'dead men walking', living in darkness and far from the eternal life God intended for us.



# Theocracy, Monarchy, Liberation + Redemption

For centuries, God's story of liberation and redemption – part of His 'Kingdom Mission' – has been enacted in the history of the world. He wants to save and rescue His creation from this dominion of darkness, in which labour is futile and the only outcome is death.

God is for us; He loves us and wants to reconcile and transform us so that we can live the life of purpose for which He created us.

*“For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's children to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of him who subjected it – in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children.” Romans 8:19-21, Christian Standard Bible*

This liberation and redemption was brought into sharp relief firstly by covenants made to [Abraham](#), through whom God promises to bless all the world ([Genesis 12:1-3](#), [Genesis 13:14-17](#), [Genesis 15:1-21](#), [Genesis 17:1-11](#)).

Abraham's twelve sons and their descendants, those who came to be known as the nation of Israel, were further witnesses to God's promises; the people through whom all the world would come to learn of the One and Only Sovereign over all. God ruled His people at this time through *theocracy*, a system of law and priesthood, and the intention was that the surrounding nations would look upon His chosen people, blessed and ruled over by God, and turn to worship Him also (Isaiah 41:20, 43:10).

The nation of Israel struggled with their unique and privileged identity. They would worship and serve God for a

season and then, when things were going well, they would become complacent and selfish, turning aside to worship gods made of wood and stone, like the nations around them. They abandoned their covenant with their King, over and over again, but He did not abandon them (Judges 17:6, Jeremiah 9:6).

Reestablishing His sovereignty over their lives, He reiterates His promises of liberation and freedom, through His just and righteous rulership, to the famous shepherd-boy-turned-king, [David of Bethlehem](#). He makes David king to rule over His people, and promises that, through him and his family, He intends for all nations to find blessing and peace. Ruling by way of *monarchy*, the nation of Israel was to be once again a blessing to all the world and witnesses of the Creator and King of all the earth (2 Samuel 7:8-12).

The tides of human history rose and fell. Israel's fortunes ebbed and flowed with these tides, experiencing periods of glorious peace and stability, as under King Solomon, David's son, but, also, periods of terrible wickedness and decline. In the final days of the monarchy, Israel demonstrated a complete deterioration in both faith and witness until, finally, they were enslaved and forcibly removed from their land under Babylonian conquest and occupation (Psalm 78:10-11, Jeremiah 32:30, 2 Kings 17:18-20).

The final book of the Old Testament, [Malachi](#), offers a glimpse into the hearts of those who had been specially chosen by God as His witnesses. Even with the perspective of their glorious history and events like the Great Exodus from Egypt, they had completely given in to apathy. They had neglected God's promises; and spiritual lethargy and a corrupt priesthood had spread unfaithfulness, cancer-like, throughout the nation (Malachi 1-4, Ezekiel 21:27).

God reigned still but His people had long since rejected Him. The glory of His presence departed from them and would not return again for over 400 years (Ezekiel 10:15-19).

# I Am

It is into this vast length of silence that the King finally speaks, announcing His impending arrival into the story of not just Israel, but the entire world (John 1:19-23,28 cp Isaiah 40:3-10). His rule and sovereignty and indeed, His purpose – that all the earth be filled with His glory – was now to be fulfilled through *christocracy*; a system of rulership in the name of His Son, the Christ, the Messiah.

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone....for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” | [Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV](#)*

The message was clear. God was still King – He has always been King – and His reign, fractured early on in human history (Genesis 2), was going to be properly reinstated through His Son, Jesus. The Word of God had been sent out and it would not return to Him void. God’s kingdom, advancing for centuries, was now being planted right in the heart of hostile territory, ground that, in the past had not only been dangerous to the King’s messengers but, in many cases, fatal (Matthew 21:27).

[The Word became human, like us](#). Anyone who saw him saw all the radiance of God’s glory; the exact representation of His being and the imprint of His nature ([Hebrews 1:3](#), [John 14:10-11](#)). The glory of the King had returned to take up residence amongst His people.

Jesus, who was in the very nature of God, emptied himself and took the form of a servant, made in the likeness of humans that sin ([Philippians 2:6-7](#)). He was God-With-Us. who became the representative of us all and in his human body, the war against the ruler of this world would be waged and won.

In Jesus Christ, it would become possible for all families of the earth, of any nationality, to find liberation, redemption and experience the righteous rulership of the King of Kings.

[The gospel](#) was the announcement of good news that Jesus, God's only Son, is both Lord and King of the kingdom and that, in him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose. The work that God had been at for a long time now culminated in a tiny, obscure town in the middle of the demoralised and Roman-occupied nation of Israel.

*Earth in shadow, restlessly hold.  
Labour's waiting, in silent hope.  
For the promise, it longs to know, what heaven holds.  
Then the angels, in holy haste.  
Lift their anthem, your Saviour lays,  
in a manger, in humble form.  
Your King is born.*

***Prince of Heaven | Hillsong Worship***

## **Repent, For The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Hand**

When Jesus arrived on the scene, he went and resided in the land of Naphtali, the 'way beyond the sea', so that the words spoken so long ago by Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: "*the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned*" (Matthew 4:15-16, ESV). The implications are clearly profound, with deeply spiritual overtones. The light and life of humanity had finally arrived and the hope of

liberation and redemption would be realised.

Then, he began preaching, saying *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent of your willfulness, your self-governing, your persistence in finding identity in false gods who cannot save and who do not, in reality, rule or even exist. Repent and turn to the One who rules heaven and earth, the maker and creator of all things, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”*

*“To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to statistical analysis. The term basileia (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven” occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. “After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” ([Acts 1:3](#)). | SBC Life*

Jesus demonstrated the power and reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, through the miraculous – evidence that he was Lord of all; healing sickness, forgiving sins, multiplying bread and fishes, walking on water...raising the dead (Matthew 15:30, Matthew 14:13-33, Luke 8:49-56).

He qualified what the Kingdom of Heaven looked like; a kingdom defined by mercy and love, failure and forgiveness, exile and homecoming. The citizens of this kingdom, he said, were otherworldly; children of light and salt, whose transformed lives of goodness and steadfast confidence would witness to the glory and power of this kingdom (Matthew 5:2-11, 13-14, Luke 15:11-32).

He stated plainly the way to this kingdom; by believing in him

and being born again of water and of spirit, further expanded on throughout his ministry as referring to the representative death in baptism and [regeneration of new life by the Spirit](#) (John 3:5, 16, John 8:24).

He taught that the kingdom was not in some far-off place, out of sight, but here, right now, in their midst (Luke 17:21).

*“The kingdom, Jesus taught, is right here – present yet hidden, immanent yet transcendent. It is at hand – among us and beyond us, now but not yet. The kingdom of heaven, he said, belongs to the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, the merciful, and those who hunger and thirst for God. It advances not through power and might, but through missions of mercy, kindness, and humility. In this kingdom, many who are last will be first and many who are first will be last. The rich don’t usually get it, Jesus said, but children always do. This is a kingdom whose savior arrives not on a warhorse, but a donkey, not through triumph and conquest, but through death and resurrection. This kingdom is the only kingdom that will last.” | Rachel Held Evans, 1981-2019*

Other places in scripture, particularly the writings of Paul the Apostle, affirm that the revelation of God’s original plan of creation, the redeeming, recreating, and re-ordering of all things, together with the reconciliation of creation to its Creator, all find their true and most meaningful significance in Jesus Christ [the King], the Word-Made-Flesh (Ephesians 1:3-10; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

The invisible God, the King of all the earth, was now revealing Himself visibly through His Word-Made-Flesh, in whose hands the world and all that is therein, has been placed and who is Lord of all (John 3:35; Acts 2:36, Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20).

# The Church Of Christ Is Born

*“When Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, he was preaching much more than personal salvation for the individual. He was preaching “a new day in an old story” – the story of God the King – and God as king in King Jesus. The one gospel is about Jesus the Lord, the King, the Messiah and the saviour. This is the story that alone makes sense of Jesus’ choice of the word ‘kingdom’ to explain the mission of God to the world.” (Scot McKnight)*

When people give [allegiance to Jesus the King](#), they are transferred out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of light, the Kingdom of God that has always existed and will always exist (Colossians 1:13). To be born again is to be [regenerated](#); the termination of people of the old creation, people enslaved to the ruler of this world, and the germination of them in the new creation with the divine life (Ephesians 4:17-24).

All of the darkness, the failure, the chaos, and ruin of our life is surrendered to the King, who erases it in the water of baptism (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6). Light enters the darkness. New life is ignited in us and the new human is reborn.

*“The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. It insists that we are saved for a purpose.” – SBC Life*

These collective ‘citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven’ are the community of believers that the New Testament calls the church, whose guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ, the King. They are his witnesses, empowered



and commissioned by him to represent him and the sovereign reign and rule of God to all the world (Acts 8:12-16,36-38, Luke 24:47).

*“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” | Acts 1:8. NIV*

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19, NIV*

## **‘Kingdom’: King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land**

1. A kingdom is a people governed by a **king**. In truth, there is only one kingdom that reigns over all, whose king is God. He has always been king, ruling firstly through *theocracy*, then by *monarchy* and now through *christocracy*. The kingdom of God has gone through many phases and a reasonable chunk of the Old Testament is dedicated to the telling of this story. You can read more about this in the article [‘Jesus, King Of The World’](#).
2. The king must **rule** over the kingdom. In biblical language, this is always firstly redemptive, and then secondly through wise governing. As Scot McKnight, historian of early Christianity, theologian, and author comments, *“kingdom redemption’ is the work of God, through Jesus, and by virtue of his sin-solving cross and new-life creating resurrection, unleashed to those who are needy because of their sins. Any kind of “redemptive” activity that does not deal with sin, that does not find strength in the cross, that does not see the primary agent as Jesus, and that does not see it all as God’s new creation life unleashed is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and good and for*



*the common good.”*

3. There has to be **people** for there to be a kingdom. In the Old Testament (OT), this was the nation/kingdom of Israel. But Israel, like a tree, has deep roots and grafted-in branches, seen in the New Testament (NT) to be the church (Romans 11:1-28).
4. A kingdom must have a governing **law**. In OT times, this was achieved through the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses. When Jesus arrived, scripture takes care to tell us that he didn't destroy this law but fulfilled it completely. By his life, death and resurrection, a greater law came into being – the Law of Cruciformity; loving as Jesus loved. Jesus stated that the entire law of the new covenant, the law which governs people of the kingdom, is summarised in these words “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love others as much as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40).
5. A kingdom must have a **land**. In the past, this has been, at various phases, in literal places like the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel. But right now, ‘the land’ is wherever the church (the community of kingdom people) takes up physical space. Wherever kingdom people reside, God, in Jesus, rules. One day, this ‘tree of the kingdom’ will fill all the earth and God's rule and glory will be seen in all things – as He intended from the beginning (Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 6:10, Revelation 21: 1, 4, Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:3-32).

*“[This] good news is as epic as it gets, with universal theological implications, and yet the Bible tells it from the perspective of fishermen and farmers, pregnant ladies and squirmy kids. This story about the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity smells like mud and manger hay and tastes like salt and wine...It is the biggest story and the smallest story all at once – the great quest for the One Ring and the quiet friendship of Frodo and Sam.” | Rachel Held*

## What About God's Promises To Israel?

Jesus was [born King](#), destined to inherit the ancient throne of David, his royal ancestor through his human descent. He will rule wisely and well, not just over Israel but over the whole world. Not only was he the descendant of King David and therefore the legitimate heir to the throne of Israel, he was also the Son of God and therefore the promised saviour and King of the world. The confluence of these two aspects is no coincidence and we can only be astonished at how God chose to bring all these things together to achieve His purpose.

God has in no way forgotten His promises to individuals or to groups of people and implicit in that are literal promises to the people of Israel, elements of which still await fulfillment ([Isaiah 52:7-9](#), [Luke 2:25](#), [Acts 26:6](#)).

*“And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” [Isaiah 11:12, NASB](#)*

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” – [Micah 5:2, NIV](#)*

Jesus left his [fledgling church](#), those first disciples who represented the expansive and diverse family that God would build through him, with a promise: that He would one day return, to take them to himself, to restore and renew all the earth, to overthrow all the different manifestations of the kingdom of this world, and to fully establish the Kingdom of

God, filling the earth with His glory. Those who confess him as Lord, Saviour and Christ [King] will be saved, including those from the nation of Israel (John 14:3, Acts 1:10-11, Romans 10:9, Titus 2:13, Revelation 1:7, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 1:10, Revelation 5:13).

When he returns, *to bring salvation* to those who eagerly wait for him (Hebrews 9:28), Israel, the people who had been God's witnesses, and indeed all the peoples of the earth, will hear the final entreaty of the King of Kings: *"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

*"By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.' "All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the LORD and will make their boast in Him." | Isaiah 45:22-25, NIV*

One day, all the earth will be filled with the glory and sovereignty of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and God will once again dwell with His people. *"The kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).

What God began in the [resurrection of Jesus](#) is what He intends to do for all of creation; to regenerate, to restore, and to fully dwell with His creation in all His glorious sovereignty.

*"One day the veil will be lifted; earth and heaven will be one; Jesus will be personally present, and every knee will bow at his name; creation will be renewed; the dead will be raised; and God's new world will at last be in place, full of new prospects and possibilities." | N T Wright*

*“In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever.” | Daniel 2:44, Christian Standard Bible*

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**The kingdom is described in the Bible in several ways, such as ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (the gospel of Matthew), ‘the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 1:11), ‘the kingdom of Christ and God’ (Ephesians 5:5) and ‘the kingdom of God’ (the gospels of Mark and Luke). You can read more about its people in the article ‘[The People Of The Kingdom](#)’. You may also enjoy [this podcast](#), produced by The Bible Project: Jesus and the Kingdom of God.**

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