

Before + After

Truth #1: 'before'

"In the beginning, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters."

In the beginning, there was nothing. A vast, endless emptiness. Deep, restless waters, devoid of life, and overshadowed by a darkness as complete and as final as death itself.

It is over this dim, watery world that the Spirit of God hovered, waiting, moving; poised to begin the work of creation. And it is into this dark world that God said. "let there be light".

This is, of course, how Genesis begins its narrative concerning the creation of the natural world (Genesis 1:1-2). But it's also an apt description of the spiritual reality into which we are all born.

Whether we know it or not, whether we are aware or not, each one of us is part of a creation that was made for a purpose – to walk with and be in relationship with God. Humans were made to be with God, to reflect His character, to glorify him and steward His good creation. And for a time, we did [walk in close companionship with God](#), delighting in His presence.

But that relationship was severed by disobedience and our spiritual connection was lost.

We were cast out of Eden, banished from proximity to the tree of life, into a land whose ground was cursed and whose wages were death. We were exiled to live under the rule of another, one to whom we had given over our allegiance – the prince of this world. His is a dominion of darkness, a realm

characterised by sin, evil, and separation from God.

Every single human is born into this dominion. As one author puts it, it is *our misfortune not our crime*. It is not our fault, it is simply our reality. And God has been working hard since that first day of exile to save us, to bring us back, to rescue us from the emptiness into which we're now all born.

This is the first truth we must come to terms with. We are born into a dying world, a temporal, fallen world that will one day pass away along with everything that's in it, ruler and subject alike. We are helpless and hopeless, separated from our true purpose and disconnected from a life-giving relationship with God.

This is our 'before'.

Truth #2: 'After'

God, who is rich in loving kindness, mercy, generosity and, above all, love, did not leave us to our fate. Hovering over the spiritual darkness of our world, He spoke words of life: 'let there be light' (John 1: 1-14).

Into the darkness, failure, chaos, and ruin of humanity, light shone, a good and healing light which the darkness of this dominion can never extinguish. This is the true light that shines ever more, even unto the perfect day, when all things will be made new (Proverbs 4:18, Revelation 21:5).

That light is Jesus, full of unfailing love and faithfulness, and to all *who [believe him and accept him](#)*, he gives the right to become children of God – to be *born again*.

He has come into this dark world to rescue us, to draw us to the Father, to bring us home. He invites every person to follow Him as His disciple, living according to His teachings and sharing His love with others. This invitation is a call to transformation and purpose, and an imperative to acknowledge

that he is Lord and Christ, surrendering to his rule (John 10:27, Romans 10:9-10). When we accept his invitation, this is our moment of rescue, an existential exchange of his life for ours, a purchase of our freedom by his blood.

This is our 'after', a second great truth: We are bought with a price, and our lives will never be the same again.

Born Again: Come As You Are, Don't Stay As You Are

In John 3:3 and 5, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again of water and Spirit."

To be born again, then, is part of the great rescue God enacts on our behalf. But what does it mean, in real terms, to be [born again](#)? What does our life look like 'after'?

Paul the Apostle says that we will live 'as children of light', throwing off our old sinful nature and former way of life and, instead, let the Spirit renew our thoughts and attitudes (Ephesians 5:22-24). Like a fine garment purchased specifically for us, we are to put on our new nature, created to be like God, truly holy and righteous.

The letter to the Ephesians (Chapter 4) then continues on, listing out more 'befores' and 'afters'—a laying down of old ways and a putting on of new habits and choices.

Stop telling lies; instead, be truth-tellers. If you're a thief, quit stealing; use your hands for good, honest work. Watch what you say; use your word for life, not death. Exchange your bitterness, anger, and harsh words for kindness, forgiveness, and a posture of tenderheartedness.

Don't allow sexual immorality, impurity or greed to be present in your life. Be holy. Don't take part in obscene stories or coarse jokes. Have speech seasoned with love and grace. Don't

have anything to do with the worthless deeds of evil or darkness, instead, expose them. For once you were full of darkness but now *you have light from the Lord*. (Ephesians 4: 3-14)

“Come as you are”, Jesus said. “Come all you who are weary and heavy burdened. Come and lay those burdens down”.

Come as you are...but don't stay as you are. “Take *my* yoke upon you, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

The call to Christian life – the ‘after’ – is a call to holiness. But that holiness is a work of God's grace as the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to live a life pleasing to God. New Testament holiness is a joyous privilege, not a heavy burden and duty, and it is a burden which Christ carries alongside us. New Testament holiness is a mark of real life, the one that Jesus rose again to give us. It's Jesus living *in and through us*.” | Lance Ralston

To be born again means that everything in our life changes, although not necessarily all at once. Becoming a Christian (a Christ-follower) marks the beginning of a lifelong process of transformation, called **sanctification**, through which believers grow to reflect the character of Christ. It is the start of a journey, not the end.

But is a journey that takes place in the glorious light of the kingdom of God, which will, one day, fill all of heaven and earth. We no longer belong to the world which is passing away, the old dominion of darkness, but instead now belong to God, in restored relationship, as we were always intended.

“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but

people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.” | John 3:18-21

An Easter Tale

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Let me tell you a tale.

It starts in a garden, long, long ago.

And what a garden it was – literally, a paradise on earth. A place of grandeur and beauty, filled with trees of every description and with leaves in every shade of green, soaring upwards toward a sky so blue it hurts the eyes.

The sound of a great river can be heard flowing through this garden paradise, a source of life and refreshing for all the living things that call it home. In the still shade of the trees, quiet pools of deep emerald green can be found, surrounded by rocks and ferns. If you listen carefully, you can hear the sound of animals scuttering through the brush, and, overheard, birds sing joyfully in the trees, lifting a chorus of praise to the One who created them.

A perfect garden; beautiful, unspoiled, glorious.

If the tale had ended here, it would be a short one, perhaps, but satisfying nonetheless.

But this is not the end of the story.

Come a little closer, deeper into the heart of the garden and you will see two trees, shimmering softly in the golden sunlight. Laden with ripe, juicy fruit, they're the most beautiful trees you've ever seen. You watch as a woman, standing underneath the long, slender boughs, reaches out her hand and plucks a piece of fruit from one. She passes it to the man standing beside her. Reaching out again, she takes another and, as they both bite into the fruit, you see movement in the branches as the sinuous form of a serpent winds itself up and away into the leaves of the tree.

Juice trickles down their chins and drips onto their bare feet. You long to join them, sharing in the delicious fruit and in a moment that seems bathed in the golden light of pleasure and contentment.

Yet, you suddenly sense a change in the air. You can see that the two humans can feel it too. Their expressions change and the sudden heaviness you feel is reflected in the set of their shoulders. Emotions chase across their faces. Discovery, understanding, disappointment, shame...

You hear a voice. A question. Even watching from a distance, you feel the need to hide, to shrink, and turn your face away in discomfort.

"What have you done?"

You listen closely as the conversation unfolds.

A punishment; life ending in death.

A promise; death ending in life.

The conversation concludes with words spoken with great love but also great sadness *"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.*

And now, you must leave."

A sharp metallic scent fills the air, new and unexpected in this place. You turn your gaze and see that a lamb has been slaughtered, its blood soaking into the ground. A mournful cry passes through your body, rising up towards heaven, and, with a deep heaviness, you realise that all of creation is echoing your cry, a keening filled with pain and loss.

Something terrible has happened in this garden. A darkness is falling in Eden. A great evil has entered paradise and Death close on its heels.

The two humans move eastward, clothed in the skin of the lamb, and then pass beyond the borders of the garden, out into wildlands they've never seen before. A flaming sword is placed at the entrance to the garden, turning every which way so that it appears to form a fiery cross. Shimmering creatures stand on either side of the sword, guarding the way back to what lies at the heart of the garden; the abundant and eternal life of God.

This is a tragedy too great to bear, a terrible price to pay, and yet you cannot look away. What did the voice mean, life springing from death? Is all lost? Surely there is still hope?

Centuries pass. The darkness only grows deeper and heavier.

The whole world lies under the power of the evil one and the heart of humanity has become hardened and sick. A long silence, nearly 400 years, has passed since anyone has heard even the voice of God. Hope seems lost.

But this is not the end of the story.

Under a star-sprinkled sky in a small middle-eastern town, shepherds are out in the fields watching over their flocks. It's census time and the town is filled to overflowing with travellers from all over the nation. The fields are the quietest place to be right now, and the shepherds are welcoming the reprieve from the thronging crowds.

Suddenly a great light appears all around them, illuminating the fields for miles in every direction. A voice speaks aloud. *"Good news of great joy for all people! Your saviour is born!"*

Salvation! Hope! The shepherds know what these words mean. The words of the promise have been passed down, in hallowed whispers, through every generation since the beginning of time itself. One day, the saviour will come. One day, the way back to the garden will be opened again. One day we will go home.

The life and light of humanity was appearing, at long last. Light was piercing the thick gloom, shining in the darkness and now they knew the truth and a promise realised, that the darkness will not overcome.

But when? And how?

The ruler of this world has a foothold in every corner and many are enslaved to his bidding. The child must be kept safe, hidden in plain sight in a small, non-descript town, thought to be of little worth, until the time is right. Not even his own family would know the truth of who he is. Not yet.

Seasons come and go. The moon waxes and wanes. Time passes.

The child is now a man, fully grown, and full of grace and truth. One day soon he will wage war against the kingdoms of this world; one by one they will fall at his feet and he will stand victorious, the triumphant conqueror and saviour of humanity.

And, even now, you think that the moment must surely have arrived. You find yourself standing in another garden, known as "the oil press", due, most likely, to the presence of the young olive trees growing in abundance all around. The ground is rocky under your feet and the moon bright overhead.

A small band of men lie asleep and, as you come closer, you see that the man is a little way off from the sleeping men,

kneeling down with his hands clasped in prayer.

You can sense the great weight and desperate solitude that lies upon him; sorrow is clearly etched across his features and, as you watch, great drops of sweat fall from his brow, soaking into the ground like blood.

The sound of footfalls and the murmur of voices can suddenly be heard floating on the still night air. A crowd of men draws close, some who look to be perhaps priests of the city, others of more humble occupation, all carrying swords and clubs. The man and his friends, now roused from sleep, stand waiting.

The leader of the crowd steps forward and kisses the man's cheek in greeting and, all at once, the rest of the crowd moves forward, as one, to seize the man, a signal having clearly been given.

Chaos erupts, a sword swings wildly and a man screams, clutching at the bleeding side of his head where moments before his ear had been. Then, suddenly, his ear miraculously reappears, reattached and healed, and the crowd falls away astonished and afraid. You can hear the man sternly reprimanding the one in whose hand the sword is found.

"Put your sword away, for all who take the sword will die by the sword."

You are confused and suddenly afraid. This is not how you expected this to go. You want to run away and, turning your gaze, you see that the small band of followers that had come with the man have done just that.

He is left alone, surrounded by a crowd who are at once afraid of him but also enraged by him. Their hate for him is palpable, and envy and violence are thick in the air.

They step forward again in sudden decision; the man is seized, unresisting, his hands are bound, and, as he is led away to be

tried, you want to weep. All those years of obscurity and safety, all the hope of the world resting in this man, and even he was no match for the dark evil in the world.

You hope for a miracle but you have seen what men can do.

The sun finally rises, illuminating a terrible sight. The man is struggling up a hill, the weight of a timber crossbeam pressing down on his bruised shoulders and back. He has been viciously beaten and his back is covered in deep welts, A rough circle of small, gnarly branches, fashioned to resemble a crown, has been jammed upon his head. The sharp barbs of the thorns cut deeply into his flesh, blood dripping down his neck and onto the wood of the crossbeam across his shoulders.

At the summit, the man is unceremoniously stripped naked, his arms are forced apart, bound to either side of the timber crossbeam, and heavy, iron nails are hammered through his wrists and into the timber.

The crossbeam is raised high above the gathering crowd, the man sucking in shuddering breaths with each jostle, and attached to a large, upright post already fixed in place. The post, stained with darkened streaks, tells the terrible history of this place, and, as the man's ankles are hammered to the upright, fresh blood flows, joining the old.

You want to turn away, you cannot bear to look any longer on the horror and humiliation, but you cannot. It seems as if the whole world's gaze must surely be turned towards this sight, forced to give witness to the deprivation and evil endured by this man.

You can taste misery and guilt, like sawdust in your mouth and feel a terrible clawing in the pit of your stomach.

At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the man dies. The crowd, who came at first for sport, are now deeply shaken by what they have seen, and return to their homes full of sorrow and

contrition. A Roman centurion standing nearby raises his voice, surely in protest of what has taken place. "*This*", he exclaims, "*was an innocent man.*" You, too, lift your voice in agreement but it is lost on the wind.

Yes. A perfect human, good and true, and all the hope of the world rested in him. An innocent man but also now a dead man.

There is nothing more that can be done.

The man's body is taken down from the cross, wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a newly cut tomb; he is the first to rest in this place. A stone is rolled across the entrance and the long-hoped-for saviour of the world is left alone, in the still darkness of the grave.

But this is not the end of the story.

A soft breeze is blowing as the first streaks of dawn creep over the distant horizon. A bird sings sweetly from a branch overhead and the grass is cool under your feet as you wander through this peaceful place.

You are in yet another garden and, as you draw closer, you realise you are near to the place where the man's body had been laid. You can hear voices, the low, intimate conversation of a man and a woman, and, as the path rounds a corner, you see them standing together beneath the trees, close but not touching. The woman has been crying, you can see her cheeks are wet with tears, but, strangely, her eyes are shining not with sorrow but instead with joy.

She turns suddenly and brushes past you, breaking into a run and is quickly lost to sight. Only the man remains.

And now you can his face clearly and you draw in a sharp breath, hope suddenly fluttering inside your chest; it cannot be!

For you saw this man betrayed, beaten, brutally executed,

buried...not three days past. You saw the light of the world, condemned and put to death and yet here he stands before you, alive.

Radiant. Restored. Resurrected.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega" he says, his voice warm with feeling, "the beginning and the end. The one who is and who was and who is to come. Fear not.

I am the first and the last. I died and, behold, I am alive forever."

He smiles and now a sob catches in your throat.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet will they live. I have swallowed up death in glorious victory and all those in me will be made alive too, an abundant and eternal life.

Do you believe?"

You nod, scarcely daring to trust what your heart knows to be true. The curse *has* been overcome, the promise *has* been fulfilled. *"Life to death, death to life, like seeds, like soil, like stars."**

"In this world, you will have trouble" the man continues "but take heart! I have overcome the world.

It was prophesied that I, the Christ, should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in my name to all nations, beginning in this place.

And now, dear heart, go, and tell the world the good news.

I am risen!"

Genesis 3:19, 1 John 5:19, Malachi 1:1, Luke 2:10, John 1:14, Luke 22:44, Mark 15:25, John 20: 18, Revelation 1:17, Revelation 22:12, John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:22, John 16:33, Luke 24: 44-46, Matthew 28:19-20

*quote by author Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019)

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The Story's Not Over Yet...

“Walking, stumbling, on these shadow feet; toward home, a land that I’ve never seen. I am changing: less and less asleep, made of different stuff than when I began and I have sensed it all along, fast approaching is the day.” | Brooke Fraser

These lyrics are from a song by Brooke Fraser, which I think really speak to our hearts as Christians. When I listen to this song, I feel as if I catch a glimpse of the real world beyond the veil, the world that exists beyond these shadowlands. For a brief moment, it seems as if I catch sight of the home that I know to be an unseen reality, that one day I’ll see, in all its fullness, for myself.

God's Story

I want to share a few thoughts about God's Story, the story we see laid out in poetry, prose, prophecy and parable in the book we call the Bible.

We might be inclined to describe the Bible as merely ‘the story of the drama of human history’ – but, in truth, it's not

history yet. History, defined as *“something that happened or ended a long time ago and is not important now, or a person who is not important now, although they were in the past”*, does not accurately describe the reality that is the Word of God.

The Story of God, of which the Bible contains many important aspects, won't become history until the arrival of *“the new heavens and the new earth, the passing away of the first earth and the moment a loud voice proclaims “behold, the dwelling place of our God is with humanity and God is all in all”* (Revelation 21: 1-3, ESV)

It would also be too simplistic to state that the Bible is merely a catalogue of continuous human drama. The Bible isn't just a collection of stories about characters and events that happened in the past, nor merely information about cultures or civilisations that have now ceased to exist. Neither is it simply a compilation of recommended principles by which to live an honest and upright life (although it does contain these things and other helpful advice besides!).

The Bible's overarching story can't be relegated to simply ancient history or human drama alone.

“For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” | Hebrews 4:12, NIV

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” | 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV

The Bible is the living, Spirit-breathed [Word of God](#), the written revelation of what God has been doing in the past and

what He is still doing right now. It's a record of how and when God communicated His intent and purpose with humanity in the past and how He has communicated to us today.

Far from being just black text on white pages alone; this book unveils the purpose, intentionality and creative action of the Eternal One; breathed out, captured by way of quill and scroll by the faithful scribes who heard 'the voice of God', and recorded the Story of God for all to read. The words on these pages capture the historical reality of God's powerful, creative activities throughout the history of humanity.

When Jesus was sent into the world, the story of what the Creator was doing was demonstrated literally, in Jesus himself, who was the Word-Made-Flesh. Jesus showed to humanity all the fullness and glory of God and His purpose, [embodied in flesh and bone](#) and tabernacling amongst us.

Powerful. Authoritative. Prince of Peace. Emmanuel (*God With Us*).

"On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe... His Word, made flesh and who dwelt among us" | Hebrews 1:1, John 1:1, ESV

By communicating through vision, in person, [through prophets](#) and finally, through His Son, we are challenged to move from simply thinking of the Bible as a book of facts or information and to instead see it as a visual recounting of what God has and is still communicating with us – the Story of God's rule and reign and the redemption of humanity demonstrated in His Son's life and death and resurrection.

This Story of God, of which the Bible contains many important details, is still being written, all around us every day. The

Bible is simply the paper record of a living transformative event, of the real and ongoing story. It provides the relevant information for us to know and understand this centuries-long event, as participants in that story and as recipients of the invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven. It contains the details we're supposed to be paying attention to so we can not just understand the story being told but choose which kind of character we'll be in that story.

The promise – that God will dwell with humanity again – is the great thread of the Bible and it's the **real story** that's being written every day, all around us in a thousand different ways.

God's kingdom in the preaching of Jesus refers not to postmortem destiny, not to our escape from this world into another one, but God's sovereign rule coming 'on earth as it is in heaven.' . . . Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny but the other, hidden dimension of ordinary life – God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last, He will remake both and join them together forever. The end times are not the end of the world – they are the beginning of the real world – in biblical understanding.” | N T Wright

The Story Begins...

The Bible opens with an account about the beginning of all things:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the [Spirit of God](#) was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created

humans in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." | Genesis 1:1-2, 26, NIV

We can tend to read this account as if it's a completed narrative. As if the statement '*Let us create humanity in our image*' was a single event that occurred in the past, one which we perhaps give little real thought to today. Yet, if we view it from a different perspective, stretching our minds a little higher, a little farther, we realise that God is still *creating humans in His image*. This is not history, this is the present reality we are living in and surrounded by.

God is doing magic, right under our noses, every single day!

[God's Spirit](#) is still hovering and continues to move in new and astonishing ways. His Word – His living Word, which brought all of the natural world into being, is continuing its creative work through redemption and regeneration in Jesus Christ, the Word-Made-Flesh. Light is still entering darkness, new life is being ignited and men and women are being reborn in God's image, to become His representatives and perfect image-bearers on this earth.

The Bible is, therefore, the only book in the world which contains snippets and segments of a real-life story that hasn't finished being told. We know what the ending will be, but we're still in it, right now, living and breathing it, every moment of our lives.

The [stories we read about in the Bible](#) then take on new significance. They're supposed to engage all our senses and connect us in very real ways to the people and situations we read about, to help us understand our place in the story that is not just theirs, but ours too. And we know that every

story, every moment, has been recorded with intentionality, to enable the reader to participate, but we also know there's plenty more, left untold, that time and space couldn't allow for:

"What else can I say? There isn't enough time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets." Hebrews 11:32, CEV

"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written." | John 21:25, HCSB

The Bible Is Our Own Personal Origin Story

Everyone's probably familiar with the idea of origin stories. An origin story is an account or back-story revealing how a character or group of people become a protagonist or antagonist in the main story. It adds complexity to a narrative, often giving reasons for the characters' intentions and choices.

The Bible is therefore our own [personal origin story](#). It tells us where we've come from and where we're going and invites us personally into the main story. The primary character in this story is the King of the Earth, God, revealed in Jesus and the antagonist, the Prince of this World – Sin. There are two kingdoms in this story – one of darkness and one of the Son of God, a Kingdom of Light. We don't get a choice about which kingdom we start out in but we certainly get to decide which kingdom we finish up in

When we read the Bible, we're not just reading **about** a story, we're actually **in** this story and it's unfolding all around us. This is a story of creative magic, impossible realities,

futility, despair and death, rescue and redemption, light, salt, allegiance and exaltation. Most of all, it's a story of hope.

It's the story of the creation of the **real world**, not this shadow world that we live in now. It's the story of how God's Will will be done on earth, as in heaven and how God will once again walk with us in paradise. It is the story of the Creator's divine life flowing into ours if we allow it.

This narrative gives shape and purpose to our human experience and [hope for our future](#).

"If we think that this life is all there is to life, then there is no interpretation of our problems, our pain, not even of our privileges. But everything changes when we open up to the possibility that God's story is really our story too." | Max Lucado

*"Your life flows into mine, pure as a garden spring. A well of living water springs up from within you, like a mountain brook flowing into my heart! Then may your awakening breath blow upon my life until I am fully yours. Breathe upon me with your Spirit wind. Stir up the sweet spice of your life within me. Spare nothing as you make me your fruitful garden. Hold nothing back until I release your fragrance. Come walk with me as you once walked in your paradise garden. Come taste the fruits of your life in me. I have come to you, for you are my paradise garden! Come walk with me until I am fully yours. Come taste the fruits of your life in me." |
☐☐Song of Songs☐ ☐4:15-16,☐ ☐TPT☐☐*

Not If, But How?

The question for us all, then, is not **if** we want to be a part of this story, but **how**.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we're all born into the kingdom of darkness. Their story is our story and we're participants in that reality, whether we're willing or not. But the Master Storyteller hasn't left the world in darkness. He has crafted a narrative of redemption and light and offers a way, through the sacrifice of His Son, for us to be transferred from that dominion of darkness and into [His glorious Kingdom](#).

Jesus came, preaching that kingdom, urging people to choose a better way and to give their allegiance to him. *"Repent, he said, for the kingdom of God is here. I have arrived, proclaiming God's rule and bringing His salvation to humanity."* (Isaiah 52:10, Luke 17: 20-21, Luke 2:30)

"What I love about the Bible is that the story isn't over. There are still prophets in our midst. There are still dragons and beasts. It might not look like it, but the Resistance is winning. The light is breaking through. So listen to the weirdos. Listen to the voices crying from the wilderness. They are pointing us to a new King and a better kingdom." | Rachel Held Evans

If you still belong to the kingdom of darkness, if you haven't yet given your life and allegiance to the King, I repeat the appeal of Paul to you: *"Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God Himself were making His appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into His friends!"* (2 Corinthians 5:20)

If you have given your life to Jesus through baptism, then Good News: So Glorious! You've been transferred into the Kingdom of Light. **Don't be a passive participant in the Story.**

You are a child of God, a member of the household of faith, a character in God's story whose name is written in the book of life! (Psalm 56:8, Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16, Philippians 4:3)

Boldly take hold of your place in the story. Be [strong and courageous](#) and don't fear the enemy who surrounds you. [Jesus, your King](#) reassures you: *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17, BSB)

"All of their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: Now, at last, they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. | C S Lewis, The Last Battle

A Christian Response To The Global Crisis

How we, as Christians, respond in times of crisis is not just vitally important for our own faith and for our witness of the gospel, it's important for the wellbeing of those around us, who may be struggling with doubts and fears in what is a very distressing and anxious time.

A Measured And Faithful Response

I want to speak plainly to a disturbing trend currently being observed amongst some, in response to the current pandemic facing the globe. It's a response that could almost be described as 'tone deaf'; that many seem to be unaware and unobservant to the fear and anxiety of the people around them and, unwittingly or not, are adding to that fear and uncertainty with ill-thought through posts or shares online. Or, even worse, they're well aware of the fear and are

choosing to actively capitalise on it to promote apocalyptic predictions or outcomes. Whilst we shouldn't be ambivalent about what's going on around the globe, we also need to be measured in our response and very careful not to be contributing to or escalating the level of panic that people may be experiencing.

When people are struggling with an uncertain future, have recently lost employment or are concerned for the wellbeing of their loved ones, Christians have both a responsibility and a privilege to point the world's attention to the One who is still in control of all. Not only that, we can choose to positively redirect the conversation, using our confidence in the God of all the earth to comfort people's hearts and settle their fears.

For Christians, times of trouble, in this particular case, the far-reaching effects of Covid-19, are, firstly, an opportunity to test and prove our own conviction; that there is One God and Father who rules over all things (Psalm 103:19, Daniel 2:21, Ephesians 4:6). We have confidence that the Father has an ongoing rescue plan for humanity and that He has given authority over to His Holy Son, Jesus Christ, who holds all things in his hand (John 3:35, Matthew 11:27). It can be difficult in times of crisis to remain convicted of this, but we must continue to have confidence in God's promises and in the power and authority vested in the name of Jesus. We acknowledge that, as Christians, we are not immune to these troubles and our prayer is not that we would be removed from this but that we would be protected from evil (John 17:15). It is our Christian ideals, in fact, that enable us to see purpose in our suffering and recognise the joy which can overcome all troubles, even the love of an everlasting Father.

"The Christian ideal is not freedom from work, but strength to do it; not freedom from temptation, but power to overcome it; not freedom from suffering, but joy in an abiding sense of the Father's love; not absence from the world, but grace

to make the world better for our presence; not holy lives driven from the world, and living apart from it, but holy lives spent in the world and leavening it.” – Ellicott’s Commentary For English Readers.

Secondly, such crises are an opportunity to witness to the reality of a transformative gospel being outworked in our lives. We are to show good to all, as and where we are able (Galatians 6:10). We are to be thankful for those in authority and especially at a time like this, those in healthcare, who risk their own lives to treat and save others (1 Timothy 2:2). We need to remember to pray for them and assist where we can. We ought to show responsibility in following the direction of the government and officials, acknowledging measured concern for the situation we all find ourselves in and abiding by recommendations for the good of everyone (1 Peter 2:13). Now, more than ever, is the time to show consideration and restraint and to lead the world by example. It is not the time (or ever!) for Christians to display greed or selfishness but to consider those who are our neighbour and to love them, as ourselves (Romans 13:8-10). And, particularly, it is vitally important to consider those who are weak and vulnerable amongst our communities, who have always found a special place in God’s heart (James 1:27; Psalm 68:5).

Trust in God’s sovereignty is not to be made dependent on human expectation of a particular timetable or outcome. For the present, it is enough that God’s rule is expressed in and through His Spirit. | James D G Dunn

He Is A Good, Good Father

It is our commission, as Christians, to remind the world of a good, good God, who is actively seeking to overthrow the effects of sin in the world and restore humanity to full relationship with Himself. He is the One who rescues the poor

who cries for help and the fatherless, who have none to assist them (Job 29:12). He sees the grief and anxiety of the afflicted and upholds the cause of the poor and the oppressed (Psalm 82:3). We need to reaffirm and speak this truth to each other and to the world! Christians are intended to be the light of the world, bringing hope to those who have none, especially in times of crisis and trouble.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” – Matthew 5:14, BSB

As Christians, we are emboldened to stand together now in faithful response, banishing exaggerated fear and pleading the cause of those who are afflicted and defenceless in this crisis. We need to pray, to worship and to continue to connect in all the ways that are possible to us right now. Most of all, we need to continue to point the people of the world to Jesus, who told his much loved followers: “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Trust in God and trust in me also” (John 14:1).

If you are feeling anxious or fearful about the current situation, I want to encourage you to lay your burdens at Jesus’ feet and to share that anxiousness with him. If you want prayers for you or with you, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

We have hope, as Christians, that God is actively working to restore all things to Himself and that one day soon, the earth will be filled with His glory and all tears will be wiped away (Habakkuk 2:14, Revelation 21:4). It’s our responsibility and privilege to share this hope with the world and comfort their hearts in times of trouble.

“But for you who obey me, my saving power will rise on you like the sun and bring healing like the sun’s rays. You will be as free and happy as calves let out of a stall.” – Malachi 4:2, GNT

Let's pray for our communities, our country, and for the world, that God will bring healing, peace, and restoration to our lives, if it is His will and that this incredibly strange situation might provide opportunity to impact hearts for good, for His glory and His kingdom.

Finally, "Have courage, and be kind..." | Cinderella

The Parallels In Communion

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." | 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, ESV

We Who Are Many Are One

Paul the Apostle's words, here in Corinthians, reference the deep and powerful truth which is embedded in the Christian ordinance of communion. The truth that, in taking the cup and sharing the bread, we are fully participating in Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus is the common element that binds believers together and his sacrifice is what makes the new resurrection life possible for every person who believes in his saving name.

This participation together in drinking wine and breaking bread is a compelling witness to the 'common union' believers share in the blood and body of Christ, the sharing in his sin-conquering death and his life-giving resurrection. There is nothing more powerful or significant for a church community

than remembering the very thing which gave the church its birth and which binds each member together as part of 'the whole'.

For this reason, sharing communion is not just about remembering the death of Jesus, including the anguish, surrender, and sacrifice but also about celebrating his resurrection; the vanquishing of sin and the victory over death, won for every person who associates with his name. The new creation was born from his sacrifice and confirmed by his resurrected life, of which we are now all a part, bound together by the life-giving spirit of Jesus himself.

Sharing communion together as believers is primarily a time for celebration, for thanksgiving and praise, for "by his blood and in his name, in his freedom we are free!"

In celebrating this ordinance together, believers are not just connected to Jesus but to each other. It's significant that Jesus associates the institution of communion – which speaks of his sacrifice and death, motivated by love – with the importance of his followers showing his love by **loving one another**.

During the meal (Matthew 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26, Luke 22:7–39, and John 13:1–17:26), Jesus takes the bread and shares it with his disciples, telling them that it is symbolic of his body, soon to be broken for them in death. He shares the cup of wine, telling them it is a symbol of his blood, poured out for the forgiveness of their sins.

He gently tells his disciples that he will only be with them a little longer, referencing, of course, his impending betrayal and crucifixion. He then gives them a 'new commandment', to live by once he is gone:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if

you have love for one another.” – John 13:34-35, ESV

Jesus first instituted the ordinance of communion, by which his followers would remember him, during his last meal on earth with his closest disciples, but this meal had its roots in a much deeper, incredibly powerful story of deliverance and freedom.

A Story Of Deliverance

The institution of communion had its origins in an ancient Jewish festive meal known as ‘Passover. Celebrated annually, it commemorated the deliverance of the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

The early chapters of the book of Exodus tell of the origins and background of the Passover (Exodus 1-12). Forcibly enslaved upon the accession of a new Pharaoh to the Egyptian throne, the people of Israel were subjected to cruelty, forced labour, and intolerable work and living conditions. In an effort to cull their numbers, Pharaoh had issued a directive of neonaticide for any male baby born. As soon as the baby was delivered, he was to be killed by the attending midwives. It was a terrible time for the people of Israel – cruelly mistreated and living in hopelessness, with no means to save themselves.

With heavy burdens bitterly borne, they desperately lifted their voices heavenward. God heard their cries for rescue and remembers his promises to their patriarchs [Abraham](#), Isaac, and Jacob, long ago (Exodus 2:24).

“And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” – Exodus 3:7-9

God stepped into their misery and suffering and promises to deliver them out of the affliction of Egypt. Through a series of plagues, demonstrating His almighty power, and the final dramatic death of Egypt's own firstborn, God exercises His powerful arm of redemption and leads his people out of slavery to freedom and their promised land.

On the night of their leaving, the Israelites prepared unleavened bread and lamb, roasted over the fire. The lamb's blood was brushed on the lintel and two doorposts of every Israelite home. When the Angel of Death went throughout Egypt, killing the firstborn, he would see the blood and 'pass over' that house, sparing all those who were inside.

The night of Passover marked the end of slavery and brought deliverance and the beginning of the people of Israel's journey towards the promised land. Through death and sacrifice, came new life and hope.

The types that can be seen in this event for a Christian's new life are clear. It's no coincidence that Jesus uses this commemorative Passover meal, already 1,500 years old by this time and full of ancient symbology and meaning, to bring his disciples' attention to his own impending death, through which their rescue from 'slavery to sin' will be achieved.

Parallels In Leaving Egypt

Paul the Apostle observes that the events of Israel's exodus and subsequent journey through the wilderness towards the promised land are parallels of a Christian's new life in Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:1-13). He uses Egypt as a metaphor for sin and spiritual darkness and the exodus as an example of the freedom Christians experience in being rescued from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

The **first parallel** to note is that of slavery. Just as the people of Israel were completely enslaved to the Egyptian

Pharaoh, we are all slaves to sin, born so at birth and only confirmed throughout our lives by our sinful deeds (Romans 5:12, John 8:34). Yet God provided a deliverer, as He did for Israel, and the blood of this deliverer gives [salvation from death](#), which we are promised no longer has any hold over us (John 11:25. 1 Corinthians 15:55).

The **second parallel** is, of course, the sacrificial lamb. It is John the Baptist who first introduces Jesus as 'the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Isaiah, a prophet in Old Testament writings, also prophesied of one who would come to bear the sins of the world and that he would be 'led like a lamb to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53:7). The final book in the Bible, Revelation, confirms that Jesus was indeed the Lamb of God 'slain from the foundation of the world' (1 Peter 1:19, Revelation 13:8).

The theme of a sacrificial lamb has been constant throughout scripture (Genesis 3:21, Genesis 22:8, Numbers 9:12, Ezra 6:19, 2 Chronicles 35:11) and always intended to point forward to Jesus, who would be the ultimate sacrifice for all those who wanted to escape their inherent slavery to sin and death.

The **third parallel** is the deliverer himself. God raised up Moses, a natural-born Israelite to lead His people from Egypt. Adopted into Pharaoh's court as a baby and growing up under the very nose of the ruler of his people, Moses was not an outsider or a stranger but a man just like the people whom he would rescue and lead to freedom. The people of Israel were *his* people and their suffering was intimately connected with the suffering of *his* family.

One of the prophecies concerning Jesus was that he would be 'called out of Egypt'. This reveals the deeper truth about [Jesus' connection to the people he would come to save](#).

"And he [Joseph] rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the

*death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [Hosea 11:1], "Out of Egypt I called my son."
| Matthew 2:14-15, ESV*

Jesus' redemptive work on behalf of humanity was deeply connected to his own humanity. Although he was the Son of God, and radiant with his Father's glory, he participated in every way in all the experiences of what it means to be human. His ability to sympathise with us and to reconcile on our behalf springs from a complete understanding of what it is like to be human; with all our doubts, fears, temptations, and failures, without ever failing himself. He understood humans because he was human.

A **fourth parallel** exists in connection with the Passover and Exodus – that is, the crossing of the Red Sea. Paul the Apostle calls this crossing being 'baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Corinthians 10:1) and comments that the Israelites all drank the same spiritual drink, which was Christ.

"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." | 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, ESV

Like the people of Israel, every person who desires to follow Jesus and 'drink from that spiritual rock' must first pass through the water of baptism, 'under the cloud and through the sea'. The journey only truly begins on the other side of the ocean.

These parallels in the exodus story to our own Christian salvation are remarkable. They demonstrate the absolute power

of God to achieve His purpose and that His plan of salvation has been in motion from the beginning of the world. God is on the move and God has always been on the move!

Paul reminds his readers that “all these things [that occurred to Israel] happened to them as examples for us” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Their defeats, joys, sufferings and victories were experienced as people who were ‘God’s witnesses’ (Isaiah 43:10) and from their stories, we can draw powerful truths about what God has done and is still doing for us.

The fact is, God moved heaven and earth to rescue His people Israel and He has done nothing less than this for us, through the sending of His son, while we were still ‘in Egypt’.

“But God proves His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” | Romans 5:8, ESV

Through something as simple as bread and wine, Christians are reminded of God’s promise of deliverance and of their forgiveness and freedom gifted through Jesus’ sacrifice. It is a tangible witness to the transforming power of [the Gospel](#) in people’s lives and the faithfulness of an eternal God.

[Disciples of Jesus](#) – Christians – have continued to celebrate this new covenant since that time, through the participation together of *communion*, the eating of bread and the drinking of wine ‘in remembrance of Jesus’.

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s trespasses against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God...” | 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, BSB

If the story of the Exodus has resonated with you; if you recognise that you are 'in Egypt', in slavery to sin and subject to the power of death and you want rescue, I implore you on behalf of Christ – be saved! (2 Corinthians 5:20) God had so much love for the world that He gave His one and only Son, for everyone, and that includes you! The Gospel is Good News for every person and I believe God is still making a move, doing exciting things right here in the Northern Rivers! I'd love to help you be reconciled to Him! (If you're unsure whether the Christian life is for you and just want to chat it over, with no pressure or expectation, I'd love to hear from you too). [Follow the link](#) to get in touch.

Keen to learn more about the book of Exodus? Head on over to [The Bible Project](#) website (click the link) where you'll find a couple of great overview videos.

Jesus: King Of The World

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 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. The royal line, although still in existence, no longer occupies the throne. Israel is a shadow of her former glory; a vassal state under the domination of the Persians, the great world power of the day. Ezekiel's prophecy against Israel – a result of their rebellion of God's sovereignty and their faithlessness as His witnesses – has been utterly effective:

“You profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! The crown will not be restored until he to whom it rightfully belongs shall come; to him I will give it.” | Ezekiel 21: 25-27, NIV

Demoralised and disloyal, the people of Israel continued to go about their religious obligations but they had completely lost faith in God and doubted His love for them. They believed that nothing good ever came from following God and forgot, as they had many times before, His blessings and favour of them as a people. They had no confidence He even cared about their future.

This final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of those who had been specially chosen by God as His witnesses to the nations around them. 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 spread unfaithfulness, cancer-like, throughout the nation.

Malachi’s words are the last message from God to His people and, for 400 years after, there will be silence.

God’s Announcement – I Am Arriving!

It is to this vast length of silence that God finally speaks, announcing His impending arrival into the story of not just Israel, but the entire world. The work that God had been at for a long time was about to culminate in a tiny, obscure town in the middle of the demoralised and now Roman-occupied nation of Israel. The glory of God was about to be revealed to all

humanity.

John the Baptist, God's messenger, bursts onto the scene, "preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). But there was more.

"As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptising you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out." | Mark 1:7-8, MSG

John was simply the messenger. The 'star in this drama' was none other than God's own son, Jesus Christ. He was coming, not only to save people from their sins but to be God's perfect image-bearer and to restore God's righteous rulership. Jesus had been prophesied to be king of the world ([Luke 1:30-33](#), [Matthew 21:5](#), [John 12:13](#), [Luke 19:38](#)) and his message of good news would totally change people's lives.

God's Kingdom And The Arrival Of The King

We were created intentionally and with purpose, to be the image-bearers of God, the king of the earth. We were destined to be like Him and enact His will throughout the world. The first humans, 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. This is where we first see the concept of God's reign – His sovereignty – displayed (Genesis 1:26).

However, instead of partnering with God, Adam and Eve sought to undertake this rule on their own terms, setting in motion the destructive cycle the world has been subject to ever since. The story of human history is really the story of human failure in accomplishing God's purpose, and God's continual involvement in the chaos and mess that we have created, to

save us from ourselves.

For centuries, God's story of liberation and redemption – part of His 'Kingdom Mission' – has been enacted, over and over again in the history of the world. Firstly, with 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). Then with Abraham's descendants, those who came to be known as the people of Israel, who were intended to be God's witnesses to His Kingdom Mission.

“But you are my witnesses, O Israel!” says the LORD. “You are my servant. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other God – there never has been, and there never will be. Yes I am the LORD, and there is no other Saviour.” | [Isaiah 43:10-4, NLT](#)

Finally, God personally steps into the drama in the person of His Son; [born as a human like us](#), yet expressing and embodying the entire fullness of God's nature (Matthew 21:37, Matthew 1:22-23, Isaiah 7:14, John 1:14, John 14:9, John 12:45, Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 2:9). The relationship between humanity and God, broken in the Garden of Eden, was going to be reconciled. God's good creation, damaged by Adam and Eve's disobedience, was going to be restored. Not only that – God's Kingdom Mission – that all the earth be filled with His glory – was finally breaking through into the kingdoms of mankind. It had been advancing for centuries but finally, it had arrived and 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.

“From the days of John the Baptist until the present, the kingdom from heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been attacking it.” | [Matthew 11:12, ISV](#)

“The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” | Mark 1:15, NLT

God’s Upside-Down Kingdom

The idea of ‘the kingdom of God’ was consistent with the Jewish hope of a saviour and the arrival of the one who would be the ‘consolation of Israel’. (Isaiah 52:7-9, Luke 2:25, Acts 26:6). The prophet Isaiah speaks poetically about the one who would bring peace, justice, and righteousness again to Israel. This national hero would be from David’s royal line and Isaiah predicted that his kingdom would have no end.

“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 Counselor, 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

“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

“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” | John 4:42, NIV

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” | [Luke 1:30-33, ESV](#)

Yet God’s kingdom was not going to arrive in the way that the nation of Israel expected. In reality, this kingdom had very little to do with Israel’s nationalistic hopes of liberation from the Romans. This messianic saviour was also intended to be the saviour of the world and the righteous king of God’s choosing. Israel was correct to expect him to be from David’s royal family line but pitifully ignorant to think that he would only be coming to overthrow the Romans and restore Israel’s monarchy.

So while the nation of Israel expected a royalist and a revolutionary, one who would come to conquer and overthrow by violence and force, their saviour arrives instead in the humblest of forms, a small baby, born to an insignificant family. As this child grows into a man, he teaches of a kingdom of service and love, not of domination or force. This kingdom is about repentance and return to the one true king of the world. This kingdom will deliver humans from the worst kind of domination; slavery to sin and death, and bring them back to a whole and restored relationship with God.

This is not what the nation of Israel expected and even Jesus’ disciples, his closest companions who knew him best, were dismayed and confused by his arrest, trial, and subsequent death, not fully understanding his purpose and mission:

“And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.” | Luke 24:17-21

The Kingdom Of The King

Jesus came as the perfect example of what God is like. [The Word became a man](#), like us, that we might truly know and appreciate the depth of God’s reconciling work on our behalf. In the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, all families of the earth, of any nationality, are able to be blessed and experience the righteous rulership of God.

Jesus was born to be king and He is God’s perfect king. He upholds the requirements of God’s righteous laws and enacts justice on behalf of his people. His power is not demonstrated in ruthless coercion, but in love, poured out on the cross. His might is not revealed in political coups and military advances, but by redeeming humanity and transforming our hearts.

“We need to shed our unearthly and nonsocial and idealistic and romantic and uber-spiritual visions of kingdom and get back to what Jesus meant. By kingdom, Jesus means: God’s Dream Society on earth, spreading out from the land of Israel to encompass the whole world.” | Scot McKnight

As more people come to believe in Jesus and the power of his

message, surrendering to his rulership in their lives, God's kingdom grows and develops, until one day it will fill the whole earth. One day, the relationship between humanity and God will be totally restored, [the earth will be completely filled with God's family](#) and the last great enemy, even death itself, will be destroyed ([1 Corinthians 15:25-26](#)).

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever." | Daniel 2:44, NASB

This is a kingdom that has been advancing for thousands of years. It is the core message of the gospel, which confirms to us God's purpose with humanity and how God's Kingdom Mission can become our story too. And the king of this kingdom is none other than Jesus Christ, born to be king of the world!

"Hail, the prince of heaven comes, angel choirs sound the call, for this babe wrapped in a cloth is the incarnate word of God. All the kingdom and its power, resting now in this child, prince of heaven, Jesus: hope of the world." | [Prince of Heaven](#)

"Something happens when people tell the story of Jesus and start living like he really is the king of the world. That's when this gospel becomes the best news that you've ever heard." | [The Bible Project](#)

The kingdom is also described in the Bible in other 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 the kingdom in the article '[The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet](#)'. You may also enjoy [this podcast](#), produced by The Bible Project: Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

What Is A Disciple?

The word disciple occurs frequently throughout the Bible and '[discipleship](#)' is something that the Bible references often. But what does the word *disciple* actually mean? And what does it mean to be a *disciple of Jesus*?

What Is A Disciple?

Our English language Bibles were translated from manuscripts written primarily in two languages; Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek (in the New Testament). The translative history of the Bible is a fascinating journey, from an academic and historical perspective, and is well worth exploring. You can [read more about the translation process here](#).

In the original language of the New Testament, the word *disciple* is translated from a Greek word, *mathētēs* (μαθητής), from *manthano*, meaning "to learn". *Mathētēs* therefore means (unsurprisingly) *a learner, a pupil or a scholar*. More accurately though, it means to be a learner *in the style of an apprentice*, that is, someone who not only accepts the views of their teacher but is also practising the same so as to eventually become like their teacher (Matthew 10:24, Luke 6:40).

It's a word that would have been in common use during ancient times and its meaning was applicable beyond a Christian or

religious setting (ie as a disciple of Plato or Socrates). Although the word has several applications, in the widest sense it refers to those who accept the teachings of anyone, not only in belief but also in life and practice.

Who Is A Disciple Of Jesus?

When we come to the Bible, we see the word *disciple* used most often in the context of a follower of Jesus and sometimes of John the Baptist (Matthew 27:57, Luke 14:27, Matthew 11:1, John 3:25). Throughout the gospels, it's the only name used for those who followed Jesus, and even those who had only been baptised with the baptism of John the Baptist (and hadn't received the Holy Spirit) were called disciples (Acts 19:1-4).

It would be accurate to say that a disciple of Jesus was someone who [believed the teachings of Jesus](#), who surrendered to his leadership, and who endeavoured to imitate his life.

When we move into the early history of the church (found in the book called the Acts of the Apostles), we see these disciples began to be called *Christians* (from the Greek word Χριστιανός (Christianos), meaning "follower of Christ") (Acts 11:26).

The Acts Of The Apostles

The book of the Acts of the Apostles provides a unique glimpse into the story of the early Christians, and to a time when these disciples of Jesus took their faith and began boldly proclaiming it to the world. In Acts, we are observing the very birth of Christianity – the movement which recognised and preached a resurrected Jesus as the promised saviour and king of the world.

The Book of Acts opens with this introductory paragraph by its author, Luke, also one of the four Gospel writers and one of Jesus' 12 closest disciples:

“Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said goodbye to the Apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God.” | Acts 1:1-4, MSG

The book’s narrative describes the disciples as first-hand witnesses to the resurrected Jesus; witnesses to the astonishing truth of the Gospel message, and how they took that Good News to the world, beginning first in Jerusalem, then moving throughout Judea and eventually to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

The interactive map below shows the power of their witness to the gospel message, demonstrating not just areas where professing Christians are the majority of the population, nor where Christianity has been declared the national religion, but also the true extent of the global spread of the gospel since the first century. It’s a powerful, visual reminder of God’s promise to save people “from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

What Was The Good News?

Peter the Apostle, when making his speech to the Jews in Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost, summarised the Good News in this way:

“Jesus the Nazarene, a man thoroughly accredited by God to you – the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through him are common knowledge – this Jesus, following [the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God](#), was betrayed by men who took the law into their own hands, and was handed over to you. And you pinned him to a cross and killed him.

But God untied the death ropes and [raised him up](#). Death was no match for him...All Israel, then, know this: There's no longer room for doubt – God made him Master and Messiah, this Jesus whom you killed on a cross. Change your life. Turn to God and [be baptised](#), each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.” | Acts 2:26-40, MSG

Peter is attesting to the validity of Jesus of Nazareth, as God's appointed saviour and king. He is witnessing to the truth of the resurrected Jesus and the confirmation of his true identity as Son of God. And he is urging his listeners to believe this truth, to surrender their lives to Jesus and receive God's promise of forgiveness of sins and the hope of life, even after death. In short, he is urging them to become disciples of Jesus, followers and imitators of the Christ. He is urging them to become Christians!

The number of people who heard his message and believed his words on that day was incredible! The book of Acts tells us that over 3000 people [were baptised](#). And not only that, every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Acts 2:47)

“That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptised and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, [the life together](#), the common meal, and the prayers.” | Acts 2:41-42, MSG

The Teachings Of Jesus: The Gospel Of Good News

Peter was, in reality, only reconfirming the teachings of Jesus; that of the Good News of salvation for humanity and

truth of the kingdom of God; God's rightful rule and sovereignty over all the earth ([Matthew 16:27](#), [Luke 21:26-27](#), [James 2:5](#), [1 Corinthians 2:9](#), [Numbers 14:21](#), [Psalm 22:27](#), [Habakkuk 2:14](#)).

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." | Mathew 4:23, NIV

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. "The time is fulfilled," He said, "and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" | Mark 1:14, BSB

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed." | Isaiah 61:1, NLT

"Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." | Matthew 9:13, ESV

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." | Luke 17:20-21, NKJV

How Do I Become A Disciple?

Becoming a Christian and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ **is the same thing**; we just don't really use the word disciple much anymore. The basis for us to become Christians remains

the same as for those in the first century, who were Jesus' followers. So what is it that makes us a *disciple of Jesus*? What is it that makes us a *Christian*?

We need to look no further than Peter's words to the people at Jerusalem (Acts 2:22-42):

- We must believe that Jesus was **God-sent and God-endorsed, as the appointed saviour and king of the world**. We acknowledge that Jesus came as one of us, like us in every way, so that he could defeat sin and death on our behalf (1 John 4:14, Galatians 4:4, John 3:16, Hebrews 2:14-17, Romans 5:12).
- We must believe that Jesus **died for the sins of the world** and was raised to life, never to die again (1 John 2:2, John 4:42, 1 John 3:5, Acts 2:32, Acts 3:15, 1 Corinthians 6:14, Romans 8:11).
- We must be **convicted of our sin, acknowledging our need for God's forgiveness and recognising that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven by which humanity can be saved** (Ecclesiastes 7:20, 1 John 1:9-10, Romans 3:23, James 1:15 Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:5).
- We must believe in the teachings of Jesus and **surrender to his guidance and leadership in our life**, not only as an apprentice to a teacher, but as a willing subject of God's designated King. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he has first claim on our affections, he is the motivating force in our decisions and the final judge of our soul (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22. 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).
- We must **follow the example of Jesus and be baptised**, as directed in Mark 16:16. Baptism is God's arrangement for

a person to gain a clean conscience based on their faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We choose to end one kind of life and begin another and the way of demonstrating that choice is to be baptised 'for the repentance of our sins'. The Bible compares baptism to burial, 'dying' to our past course of life and beginning a new one as a Christian, dedicated to God and saved through Jesus (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).

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, [the Apostles' Creed](#) summarises foundational Christian beliefs taught by the early church and is a bold declaration of our faith in Jesus Christ. It particularly affirms the teachings regarding Jesus, that of his virgin birth, his crucifixion, his death, and his subsequent resurrection; core elements of the gospel of good news. It is a primary statement of faith shared by Christians around the world, uniting them in common union with the work achieved in and through Jesus.

Not Just A Disciple Of Jesus But Family Of God

Welcome to the family! When God puts you in Jesus, He also puts you [in community](#). When you believe and are baptised, you become a disciple of Jesus – a Christian – but not only that, you also become a valued member of God's family (1 Corinthians 12:27, Galatians 4:7, Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:26, 1 John 3:1-2, Ephesians 2:18-19, Ephesians 3:14-19). Becoming a Christian means you join a great cloud of faithful witnesses to the truth of the resurrected Christ (Hebrews 12:1), as believers of the message of Good News and disciples of Christ the King.

"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be

saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” | [Romans 10:10, NIV](#)

<https://vimeo.com/113801439>

Grasping Hold Of Grace: Repentance

Imagine a man lost the middle of the Atlantic ocean. He doesn't remember how he got there or where he's going, all he knows is this endless swimming in circles. No ships in sight, he's been treading water for hours and now he's beginning to tire. There's a very real danger that he will actually drown – that's if the hypothermia doesn't get to him first. He doesn't realise this, however. He thinks he'll be fine, that there's nothing precarious about his situation. He'll make it to shore.

Suddenly, almost miraculously, a ship appears on the horizon. The man gazes at it in interest. It could be useful to him – the water is becoming colder and he feels very tired. The ship slowly draws closer and the captain appears, signalling from the bow.

“You poor creature! You look like you could do with saving! Luckily for you, I've got everything you need right here on board; food, water, dry clothes, first aid... the only thing you need to do is grasp hold of the life buoy I'm going to throw to you.”

He leans over the side and throws the buoy into the water, where it lands near the man's head.

The man's expression changes and he looks at the buoy disdainfully. "Conditions for rescue? I've never heard of such a thing. I shouldn't have to do anything, I've been swimming for hours. In fact, I was doing fine before you arrived. I really don't need your help. If you want me to get in the boat, you'll have to come down here and get me."

"Believe me", the captain replies. "I've thought of everything and this is the only way for you to be saved. I promise the buoy is large and easy to grasp and not heavy at all. You won't have any trouble, you just need need to reach out and take hold of it."

The man shakes his head. "Nope. I'm not happy with those conditions. It doesn't seem fair to me. I don't see why I should have to do anything. And look, if we're being honest, I was doing pretty fine on mine own anyway. You can keep going, thanks."

"Well, look, you really don't have to do anything, apart from take hold of the buoy", the captain replied. "I've done everything else for you. I'll pull you in...just grab hold."

The man shakes his head again, angry now. "I really resent you saying you'll save me and making me do all the work. I'm supposedly the rescuee – I shouldn't have to do anything! Nope, I don't like that at all. And in fact, I don't need saving anyway. You can take your buoy and get lost."

The captain shakes his head sadly. "I know you need the buoy. I'm not going anywhere – I'm hoping you'll see sense and change your mind". The man turned his back on the buoy and continued treading water...

Needless to say, the man drowned several hours later.

Although this is a somewhat absurd and unlikely story, it's an apt illustration of how humans often choose to view God's saving grace.

Grasping Hold Of Grace

God's [saving grace](#) is a remarkable subject, permeating every aspect of [the Gospel](#), giving it weight and power. The saving

acts of God, due to the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead bring reconciliation ("atonement") between people and God. This is why the Gospel is described as a message of hope for the whole world ([Luke 14:15-24](#)).

We see God's love for humanity demonstrated in His grace – His undeserved favour and kindness, bestowed on the human race. God's grace was shown in action – in [sending His son](#), to save the world through him. This important work was planned and has been done, on our behalf, long before we even existed. We had no part in this, nothing we did or didn't do has influenced God's decision or His plan to save humanity, or how He would achieve this. God loves because of **who God is**, not because of who we are.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16, NIV

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." – Titus 3:5, NIV

There are no disqualifying factors to who is eligible – it's not offered on the basis of race, gender, age or moral character – God's saving grace is offered to everyone. In spite of racial and ethnic prejudices, Christians in the first century came to understand that no one was to be denied hearing and obeying the message of good news.

"...God shows no partiality. Indeed, whoever fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him in any nation." – Acts 10:34-35, ISV

God wants to save us, He chose to save the world because of **who He is**. His love outweighed our desperate sin and He went to extraordinary lengths to save us.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9, NIV

And yet, there is a catch to grace – a condition, if you like. Saving grace exists in the same way that the life buoy floats on the ocean. Available, accessible, obtainable. We exist in the same way as a man treading water in an endless sea. Hopeless, helpless, dying. God calls to us – *I can save you, I can offer you hope and life – just grab hold.*

Like the drowning man, in the middle of the frigid ocean, we must grab hold of the life buoy if we want to be saved. There is a condition. We must do **something**. The condition to receiving grace is **receiving grace**.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23, ESV

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8, NIV

Receiving Grace: Repentance

The Bible calls receiving God’s grace *repentance*. Literally, repentance means to turn back, to change one’s mind. However, the Bible tells us that true repentance is not only a change of mind but is also a change in actions.

*“...but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, **performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.**” – Act 26:20, ESV*

The Acts of the Apostles focuses heavily on the aspect of repentance relating to salvation. It wasn't a new theme – John himself had preached the baptism of repentance, but now the apostles really seek to impress on believers and non-believers alike the connection between repentance and receiving God's grace – His saving work through Jesus:

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." – Acts 2:38, NIV

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out." – Acts 3:19, ESV

"When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." – Acts 11:18, NIV

Acknowledging our need for God's grace – changing how we think about sin – and then acting in accordance with that change of mind is the true definition of biblical repentance. It is looking away from our hopeless, ungodly self and looking to God's grace. It is **believing that we need saving and reaching out to receive it.**

We choose to end one kind of life and begin another and the way of demonstrating that choice is to be baptised 'for the repentance of our sins'. The Bible compares baptism to burial, dying to our past course of life and beginning a new one as a Christian, dedicated to God and saved through Jesus.

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him

through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” – Romans 6:1-4, NIV

“Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” – Colossians 2:12, NIV

Baptism and the steps that lead up to it are God’s arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on his faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

“This water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” – 1 Peter 3:21, NIV

Preaching the [good news](#) of salvation was the great commission given to the apostles by Jesus and baptism formed an essential part of accepting the gospel and receiving God’s saving grace.

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” – Mark 16:15-16, KJ2000

The truth is, we are all adrift at sea – drowning in our sins. The only way of being saved is to accept that fact and believe that we need saving. Accepting Jesus as the saviour provided by God for the sins of the world and being baptised as an acknowledgement of our belief is true repentance. It is the way home to a [relationship restored](#).

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” – Romans 10:10, NIV

The White Flag Of Grace

The subject of God's grace permeates every aspect of [the Gospel](#), giving it weight and power. The saving acts of God, due to the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead bring reconciliation ("atonement") between people and God. This is why the Gospel is described as a message of hope for the whole world (Luke 14:15-24).

The word 'grace' itself is described by one author as "the last, best word" in English, remaining unspoiled over the years in its meaning. Its many usages still retain some of the glory of the original, with words like *gratitude*, *gratuity*, *congratulations*, and *gratefulness* all carrying the idea of something that brings delight, joy, happiness, or good fortune.

The White Flag Of Grace

The word 'grace' in the Bible (*chen* in Hebrew, *charis* in Greek), literally means 'favour', with the idea of bending or stooping in kindness to another, together with graciousness in manner or action. The Old Testament use of the word includes the concept of those who "show favour" by undertaking gracious deeds, or acts of grace, such as being kind to the poor and showing generosity. Examples of God's graciousness are also seen throughout the Old Testament, as in Deuteronomy 7:8, Numbers 6:24–27, Psalm 119:29 and Psalm 27:7.

In the New Testament, the word grace has many layers of meaning, including the deepest and most transformative – God's saving grace, as defined by Ephesians 2 – the gift of eternal life, freely given through Jesus Christ. In God's language, His grace gives us what we don't deserve and cannot earn. This

is why it is so frequently contrasted against the Law of Moses, which still condemned every man or woman, no matter their sincerity or good deeds.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23, ESV

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” – Ephesians 2:8, NIV

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” – John 3:16-17, NIV

We see God’s love for humanity demonstrated in His grace – His undeserved favour and kindness, bestowed on the human race. God’s grace was shown in action – in [sending His son](#), to save the world through him.

God’s Grace Is A Gift

Paul the apostle frequently described God’s grace as a gift because he, of all people, understood how easy it was for Christians to be deceived into believing they could earn God’s love or forgiveness. Paul, previously known as Saul, had been an extremely zealous [Pharisee](#). He was strictly religious, scrupulously lawful and he actively persecuted the new Christian religion (believing them to be heretics) – consenting even in their murder, in the misguided belief that he was doing God’s will (Philippians 3:5-7).

Yet Paul was confronted on his way to Damascus in a very real way by the [risen Jesus](#), who made it clear to him that God’s grace is something that is given freely, not earned.

The truth is, we cannot “earn anything” from God and we don’t “deserve anything”, apart from the sentence passed on humanity for [Adam and Eve’s disobedience](#) in the beginning – mortality. Yet God generously offers us something quite different, something undeserved – forgiveness and life, **as a gift**. God has, in effect, raised the white flag of grace, enabling a way for us to be reconciled back to Him.

“He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” – 2 Timothy 1:9, NIV

God’s call to saving grace has been echoing down the centuries, appealing to any who would listen. Isaiah 55 likens this call to the provision of thirst-quenching water, free of charge, to those who are dying of thirst.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1, NIV

The Spirit Of Ungrace

Grace is, perhaps, the easiest concept to speak about in the enthusiastic language of a born-again believer (John 3:1-21) but, in reality, the hardest virtue to assimilate into our Christian lives. Legalism, not grace, is one of the first lessons we learn in life; that all things come with a price and that nothing is given for free. We can tend to persist in this mentality after our conversion, even on an unconscious level, viewing God and each other in this light.

Yet, the concept of grace flies in the face of what we perceive to be deserved or fair and offers a completely different way of seeing things – less like ourselves and more like God. Jesus taught in his now famous prayer, known as “the

Lord's prayer", that we should ask God to forgive us **as we forgive others** (Matthew 6:9-13). Peter later tried to clarify exactly what Jesus meant by this, asking him to specify how many times he was required to forgive (Matthew 18:21). Peter hadn't grasped the 'unreasonableness' of grace, as God sees it. We are to forgive **as God has forgiven us**. Wholeheartedly and without reservation.

Peter's question prompted Jesus to tell another story – that of the *ungrateful* servant (Matthew 18: 21-35). Despite having been forgiven a massive debt of some several million dollars by his master, the servant proceeded to demand repayment of a debt owed to him by a fellow servant, of only a few dollars. When the fellow servant was unable to immediately repay, he had him thrown into prison, 'until he could repay the debt' – which would have been practically impossible from his prison cell. The master soon heard of the ungrateful servant's behaviour and the conclusion of the tale is sobering:

"Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." [Matthew 18:32-35, ESV](#)

The parable was designed to impress upon the listeners the importance of their attitude towards each other in response to the forgiveness they had received from God. Keeping score or imposing limits of forgiveness simply do not find a place in Christian behaviour. God has already forgiven us a debt so mountainous that any person's wrongs against us shrink to anthills in comparison. How can we not forgive in the light of what we ourselves have received?

In fact, there is a direct correlation between our professed

love for God and our love for our 'fellow servants'. John puts it this way:

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." 1 John 4:20, NIV

Forgiveness Is An Act Of Faith

"One day I discovered this admonition from the apostle Paul, tucked in among many other admonitions in Romans 12. Hate evil, Be joyful, Live in harmony, Do not be conceited – the list goes on and on. Then appears this verse, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." At last I understood: in the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness for God to work out. I leave in God's hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy. When Joseph finally came to a place of forgiving his brothers, the hurt did not disappear, but the burden of being their judge fell away. Although wrong does not disappear when I forgive, it loses its grip on me and is taken over by God, who knows what to do. Such a decision involves risk, of course: the risk that God may not deal with the person as I would want. (The prophet Jonah, for instance, resented God for being more merciful than the Ninevites deserved.) I never find forgiveness easy, and rarely do I find it completely satisfying. Nagging injustices remain, and the wounds still cause pain. I do so because the Gospel makes clear the connection: God forgives my debts as I forgive my debtors. The reverse is also true. Only by living in the stream of God's grace will I find the strength to respond with grace toward others." – [Henri Nouwen](#)

The long and short of it is this: if we cannot show even the slightest resemblance of grace in our lives to one another, then we have totally misunderstood who God is and what exactly it is that He has done for us.

Grace teaches that God loves because of **who God is**, not because of who we are. Therefore, we choose to show that same attitude of grace in our behaviour to others. Showing grace isn't because we **should forgive**, it's because we're reminded that we **have been forgiven**.

“And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus....” Romans 3:22-24, BSB