

# Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

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I don't know about you but sometimes I feel bad for not *knowing then what I know now*.

Bad, as in, I wish I'd *known better*, I wish I had *known more*, I wish I had *known sooner* or *responded better* or *chosen differently*.

But here's the thing. We only wish this *because* of what we know now. Which is to say, in all the time that's passed from *then* until *now*, we've learned something, we've grown, we've become more equipped, less reactive, we can make better choices *only because* of what we've experienced in the past, both good and bad.

This is the value of life experience, it's what we often call the beauty of hindsight; those lessons from life that can be seen today *only because* they've been learned from what has been experienced in the past. In order to gain the wisdom needed for our tomorrow, we had to learn from experiences, both positive and negative, in our yesterday.

## If I'm Honest...

There are things in my life that I look back on and still blush over. There are things said and unsaid in my past that still cause me regret when I recall them today. There's definitely a sense, at times, that if only I could go back and do *that thing* over, things would be different.

But do you know what? Things probably wouldn't be any different. Because that was *then* and *this is now*. I'm not the same person I was yesterday or the day before that. Life is

changing me.

I may face a similar situation in the future and have learned enough from the past in order to do things differently. I perhaps wouldn't make the same choices or mistakes today as I did then, but only because those choices in the past *taught me differently* and *made me different*.

But I can't change the past, no matter how much I wish I could. I can't take today's insights into yesterday's mistakes, I can only use today's insights to grow tomorrow's wisdom.

And perhaps I shouldn't wish to change the past. Maybe I should be learning to make peace with it. Maybe I should be more thankful for yesterday's mistakes, as strange as that seems, because of the valuable lessons I learned, not just about life but also about myself.

We often look back on our past, our mistakes, or our decisions and hate ourselves for them. And while I'm not for a second suggesting we glory in sin or our mistakes (Romans 6:2), these things can nevertheless be seen from a different perspective – as powerful lessons from life – and what we learn from them can be used for good in the future. We can take the pain or regret or shame that spills over from the past and use it to empower us to do better today, to choose more wisely, and love more deeply.

We do not need to be only the sum of all our mistakes or regrets, we can be so much more than that.

## **Cancel Culture < Grace**

I've been thinking a lot about cancel culture and how it's the antithesis of grace. The current climate seems so quick to cancel others, on account of one mistake, one indiscretion, one ill-formed thought spoken out loud, one ugly sentence spoken out of the season. Yes, those things are disappointing

when they happen, and sin is still sin. We ought not to shy away from calling out sin and calling each other to repentance, reparation, and renewal.

But in others, and, specifically in the light of this article, in ourselves, our mistakes only become who we are when we embrace and celebrate them. When we show remorse, or regret, when we apologise and repent, and commit to doing better in the future, our mistakes become valuable building blocks to a better version of ourselves. Grace towards ourselves or others becomes the fertile ground for spiritual renovation and renewal. It is in our weakness that God's power is perfected (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We cannot condemn sin or mistakes or the things in our past that we're ashamed of without also offering ourselves the much-needed balm of grace that dispenses kindness, favour, advocacy, and forgiveness. We hold both in tension; the disappointment of our (or life's) failures with thankfulness for what we learned from these experiences; the grief of sin that stains alongside the healing embrace of grace that cleanses.

I can recall some unthoughtful words I once spoke about someone, a criticism of sorts I suppose. I think about these words often, actually, and still deeply regret speaking them. While I can give all sorts of reasons as to why I said them and argue that *my* underlying feelings were justified, I still wish I hadn't said them. They weren't particularly kind or graceful and, mostly, I can look back now and see that, in that moment, I was a terrible witness for Christ. The way I spoke and acted was so detrimental as an example of discipleship to others and was deeply hurtful to another person.

Although I felt *I* was on the receiving end of critical words, instead of taking a beat, thinking the situation through, and responding with grace, I simply responded in kind. There were

a million different ways I could have probably responded but the reality is, at that moment, I didn't. Of course I wish I could do it differently now *but I can't*. I can only apologise (and I have done so), learn from this mistake, and use it as wisdom for tomorrow.

I learned four valuable lessons from that experience, which I have endeavoured to implement today.

## **Words Matter**

Words matter, even when said in the heat of the moment or when we believe our feelings are justified. There's a way to speak truth but do so in love, in a way that isn't harmful or wounding. Just because we're upset, or feel maligned, criticised, or challenged doesn't mean that the way we speak doesn't matter.

I think we have all been taught to avoid having difficult conversations as a way of securing some kind of false peace. What we really should have been taught is how to have civil conversations with those very different from us, in a way that communicates our feelings or opinions well, without wounding the other.

I learned that words matter. And that I needed to guard my heart for it's out of the heart that the mouth speaks (Proverbs 4:23, Luke 6:45).

The second thing I learned flowed from this:

## **I Belong To Jesus**

I was painfully unaware of just how important other people's opinions and validation were to me. I had long considered myself to be a bit of an island, quite secure in my own company, likably sociable when necessary, and generally unaffected by others' criticisms. But this piece of stray criticism, directed at me in a time of deep upheaval in my personal life, struck like a barb in my soul. I learned at

that moment just how affected I actually was by what other people thought of me and how little security I was actually placing in Jesus's opinion of me. It came as a shock and it really rattled me.

I had to seriously rethink where I was getting my validation from. I had to reevaluate what was guarding my heart. Was my validation placed in Jesus, the rock of the ages, or did I have it resting on the unpredictable, shifting sands of popular opinion? Was I living in the freedom of Christ or stifling under the suffocating need to please people?

I needed to get more intimate with Jesus and this was an invaluable lesson to learn.

## **There Are Consequences**

Every choice, every decision, and every failure has consequences. Sometimes we or others do or say things that have irrevocable consequences in our life. And sometimes those consequences are painful and hard to live with. Other times, those consequences prove to be God moments, times when our focus was redirected or the direction of our life shifted, for good. Sometimes, they're both.

Sometimes that regretful indiscretion spurs a greater commitment to faithfulness in our relationship. Sometimes that reduced income refocuses us on what we really need in life. Sometimes that failed leader redirects our gaze towards the One we should really be following. Sometimes that disappointing verbal exchange convicts us to do better with our words. Sometimes that closed-door signals a new beginning.

And in every choice, in every consequence, Jesus is with us in it all. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, he is the same. He's been with us in our worst moments – yesterday's regrets, he's with us in our current circumstances of fear, doubt, growth, and joy – today's insights, and he'll be with us in our greatest triumphs – tomorrow's wisdom.

## Don't Beat Yourself Up About The Past

Choices have consequences and sometimes those consequences are negative, with reverberations that echo down through our and others' lives. You only need to look at the life of King David to realise that one poor decision can cause ripples of pain and fracture in individuals and families for generations. Where we can, we ought to make reparation and we should, rightly, regret our part in consequences that cause pain or injury to others.

But I think we also need to draw a line in the sand. We need to learn to forgive ourselves, to afford ourselves the same kind of grace that God so willingly offers to those who repent. We are not that terrible decision we made five years ago, five months ago, or five days ago. We don't have to stay in that place or be that person.

Jesus' sin-covering sacrifice means that we get to start each day new, means that we are washed clean and made perfect in his righteousness and that, although we are weak and often stumble, God is committed to completing His good work in us (Philippians 1:6). Jesus died for us, not because we weren't at fault but precisely because we were, sinners completely unable to save ourselves. God is not surprised by our weakness or our failure; it was part of the equation in the sending of His Son.

*"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." | 2 Corinthians 4:16, ESV*

*We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us. We often suffer,*

*but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again. We face death every day because of Jesus. Our bodies show what his death was like, so his life can also be seen in us. This means that death is working in us, but life is working in you.” | 2 Corinthians 4:7-8 CEB*

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## By One Man

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I like the Apostle Paul.

I like his ability to ‘call a spade a spade’, the unrelenting pursuit of his faith, and his bold assertion to “preach nothing but the cross of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:2). No doubt he ruffled more than a few feathers at times, with his unapologetic directness and refusal to tolerate any other gospel than that of being [saved by grace through faith alone](#).

He doesn't shy away from telling it how it was; the reality that his zeal for God had been seriously misplaced early on, and that he had been a violent persecutor and destroyer of the very faith he was now thankful to call his own.

He doesn't downplay the facts of his former life; that not only had he been zealous for the traditions of his fathers, he had also been considered an ‘up and coming’ amongst his peers, his upward trajectory in Judaism eclipsing many of those his own age (Galatians 1:13).

Yet he also doesn't state this just for effect or from a place

of pride, but rather as facts relevant to advancing the true gospel narrative he now endeavors to preach. He states that he counts all those things of his former life as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord.

He has a particularly warm and fatherly relationship with Timothy, his 'son in the faith' and he shows deep regard for several fellow workers whom he commends by name: Epaphroditus, husband-and-wife team, Priscilla and Aquila, Barnabas, Titus, Silas, Luke, Lydia, and Onesiphorus.

He demonstrates tenderness and genuine love and concern for all those of the "household of faith" and he is a passionate evangelist to those who are yet still "strangers and foreigners" to the gospel of grace. His letters to the early churches are full of pastoral advice and authoritative direction. Yet he is also unapologetically direct and is prepared to meet and name injustice or falsity head-on, as in the situation that he writes about in 2 Corinthians 7 (see also 2 Corinthians 11, Galatians 1:6–9, Galatians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 11:26).

*"Paul's letters reveal a remarkable human being: dedicated, compassionate, emotional, sometimes harsh and angry, clever and quick-witted, supple in argumentation, and above all possessing a soaring, passionate commitment to God, Jesus Christ, and his own mission." | [Britannica.Com](https://www.britannica.com)*

Paul's influence, passion, and commitment enabled the gospel of Jesus Christ to take root and flourish throughout Asia Minor, and its spread continued long after his death, reaching even to the ends of the earth.

Paul wrote several letters, one of which was the letter to the church at Rome. In chapters 5 and 6 of Romans, he covers some significant theological territory by dealing with the themes of death, life, and resurrection, which came about, he states, 'by one man'...



## By One: Death In Adam

The need for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God sits at the heart of the gospel. Paul recounts in Romans 5 how humanity found itself in the dismal state of being sinning, dying creatures and why we need forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal.

He makes his first point in Romans 5:12 where he teaches that Sin came into the world *by one man* and that death followed swiftly on Sin's heels, enslaving all of humanity in a dominion of darkness and, ultimately, separation from God.

The word he uses for 'man' is the Greek word ἄνθρωπος (anthrōpos) meaning *human*. We get our English word anthropology from the combining of *ánthrōpos* (ἄνθρωπος, "human") and *lógos* (λόγος, "study"). It's therefore strictly more accurate to say that *by one human* Sin entered the world and death spread to all.

While Adam becomes the representative of us all, the focus, I think, is not primarily on his gender (as a man) but on his humanity. In fact, scripture elsewhere confirms that Eve was complicit in sin alongside Adam (Genesis 3:6,12, 1 Timothy 2:14). Together, they were responsible for the catastrophe that unfolded.

*"The narratives of Genesis focus on conflict and resolution. God's purpose from the beginning is to have His presence fill the earth; humans are to image God and subdue the earth, i.e., bring about order and fruitfulness in creation (Genesis 1-2). Conflict enters the story when humans rebel against God (Genesis 3). Shalom is shattered, and the earth is cursed. Further degeneration takes place (Genesis 4-6) until God brings judgment and mercy (Genesis 6-9). Humans then attempt to restore God's presence (Genesis 11) before God launches His own initiative to re-establish His presence on Earth (the covenant). Genesis 1-11, then, is the founding story of*

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

The consequence of the fall in Eden – mortality – flowed from Adam and Eve to all of humanity; a literal reality and a core theological truth embedded within the Genesis record. Dying became hard-coded in our DNA.

Not only that, Paul comments later in Romans 7, Sin is a powerful and destructive force that humans find impossible to resist. Humanity has been *sold under sin*, constantly battling against the pull of our own self-will, which is invariably in opposition to God. Despite having the desire to do good, more often than not, we lack the ability to do what is right, so powerful is Sin's hold and influence over us. There is no one in all the world who has not fallen prey to Sin's insidious, whispering temptation\* (Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:21).

The introduction and continued presence of Sin in the world is what gives death its power over humanity. We die because we're mortal and death now reigns supreme and we remain dead because of the power that Sin gives death.

***In Adam, all die. This is Paul's first point and the incontrovertible theological teaching of Romans 5.***

## **By One: Life In Christ**

Yet, says Paul in Romans 5:21, and here he makes his second point, in Christ, there is life. There is another theological truth embedded within the Genesis record, a promise "that new life would be delivered out of death."

*“And I will put enmity (open hostility) Between you and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and her Seed; He shall [fatally] bruise your head, And you shall [only] bruise His heel.” | Genesis 3:15, AMP*

Humanity was promised that a descendant of Eve – [another human](#) – would arise to wage war against Sin and to overthrow death. Yet in waging this war, death would deal him a powerful blow, a seemingly mortal wound. But out of his death would flow life.

This promise would be affirmed countless times throughout scripture, and, particularly, by Jesus himself during his ministry, who stated the reason for his coming was that “they [humanity] may *have life*, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]” (John 10:10, Amplified Bible).

Unable to wage the war for themselves, God’s promise and gift to the world would go into battle on humanity’s behalf. He would wage war for all those who were weak, utterly helpless, and hopelessly enslaved to Sin. Those who were living in darkness, far from the eternal life God had intended for them. Those whose greatest enemy was death itself.

In fact, this hero’s [redemptive work](#) on behalf of humanity would be deeply connected to *his own humanity*. He had to be human, like us, in order to make atonement for the sin of humanity (Isaiah 53:6, Hebrews 2:17)

As a human, he would still feel keenly the pull of Sin’s seductive promise, the desire and temptation, as *the first Adam* had, to undertake this battle on his own terms. He would wrestle with the terrifying but necessary reality of confronting death up close; not just any kind of death but the painful and humiliating death of a traitor.

He would face the world’s great enemy alone, rejected by all, even by those who were closest to him, in the moment of his

greatest need. Defenseless, *like a lamb led to slaughter*, he would cling to the words of the Psalmist that, though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, God would be with him still. He would choose to suffer according to God's will, committing his soul to a faithful Creator.

This war would be brutal and bloody and seemingly fatal for our hero.

And yet, there would be an extraordinary twist...

Where *the first Adam* had been a living being; *the last Adam* would be a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). This hero would be human *but not merely a human*. He would be the "Word-Made-Flesh" – the 'one and only of his kind' and in him would dwell 'the entire fullness (completeness) of God's nature (Colossians 2:9).

Written into the very fabric of our reality was a powerful promise that Sin *could be* defeated by the willing sacrifice of one who had committed no sin and who had lived a perfect, moral life according to God's will. The sacrificial death of such an individual, on behalf of all of humanity, would heal the division between God and humanity, reopening the way to the eternal life God had always intended for His creation.

Scripture could not be any clearer that the victory over Sin and death was going to be God's, accomplished through the sending of His Son, the Word-Made-Flesh. Sent in the likeness of all of humanity, but in whom dwelt all the fullness of God, only the Son of God would be able to overcome and defeat our greatest enemy.

Not only that, in meeting death head-on, he would deal it a fatal blow, overturning and destroying its claim on him. Sin's power to command death would be vanquished. Jesus himself would now hold the keys of death and the grave. On the third day, at the break of dawn, he would rise from the silence, *Life* himself having swallowed up death in victory (Acts 2:24,

Romans 6:9, 1 Corinthians 15:54).

One act of righteousness, Paul says, led to justification and life for all humanity. By one man's obedience, many would be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

*"As sin has exercised kingly sway in inflicting death, so grace, too, may exercise kingly sway in bestowing a righteousness which results in the Life of the Ages through Jesus Christ our Lord." | Romans 5:21, Weymouth New Testament*

## Deeper Magic

I love how C S Lewis writes about this epic moment in his fictional work, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*:

*At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant's plate...The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan. "Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?" "Yes!" said a great voice from behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself. "Oh, Aslan!" cried both the children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad... "But what does it all mean?" asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer. "It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward." | C S Lewis*

This “deeper magic” is an immutable law of consequence, as certain as the law of gravity or the rising of the sun. Jesus has brought life and all those *in him* will live. This gift of grace has been given, the work has been finished and the end has been written. *“While we were still enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and, further, now that we are reconciled, we will also be saved by his life.”*

***In Christ, all will live. This is Paul’s second point and the incontrovertible theological teaching of Romans 5.***

## **The Resurrection: Proof + Promise**

One of the great theological truths of the Christian faith, as taught by Paul and, indeed, written into the earliest Christian creeds is the necessary and factual reality of [the resurrection](#), particularly, the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, Paul asserts that resurrection underpins the entire gospel narrative, without which all of Christian life is rendered futile.

*“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even **Christ has been raised**. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.” | 1 Corinthians 15:17, NIV*

He actually summarised the gospel by affirming three statements, one of which is a declaration of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus:

*“Remember Jesus Christ [the anointed], raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.” | 2 Timothy 2:8 | NIV*

The Christian faith asserts and teaches that resurrection is a

historical reality; Jesus Christ really did live, die, and was raised again to eternal life.

The resurrection is not only relevant to the gospel narrative, it's essential. Author Craig Blomberg comments, *"As wonderful as Jesus' life and teachings and miracles were, they were meaningless if it were not historically factual that Christ died and was raised from the dead and that this provided atonement, or forgiveness, of the sins of humanity."* Embedded in this reality is the proof that what was begun in Jesus, God intends to do for all creation.

*"The most startling characteristic of the first Christian preaching is its emphasis on the resurrection. The first preachers were sure that Christ had risen, and sure, in consequence, that believers would in due course rise also. This set them off from all the other teachers of the ancient world...Nothing is more characteristic of even the best thought of the day than its hopelessness in the face of death. Clearly, the resurrection is of the very first importance for the Christian faith" – The New Bible Dictionary 1996, p. 1010, "Resurrection".*

Jesus didn't just overcome death, his death also made reparation for all the sins of the world. Sin, in its entirety, was dealt with, once and for always\*\* (Romans 6:10). His resurrection was both proof and promise that the war against Sin had been waged and won. Death has lost its power. Those in Christ *will live*, no longer be held by death but merely passing through it. They too, like him, will be raised to life, never again to experience death.

*"I assure you: Anyone who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life." | John 5:24*

Life, and life abundantly – the same life that Jesus now

has [awaits them on the other side](#).

It's no wonder Paul concludes his thoughts on this subject with these inspiring words: *"In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!* (Romans 8:7-39, CEV).

This is indeed good, good news!

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**\*apart from Jesus, of course.**

**\*\*This, of course, doesn't mean that we don't still struggle with sin – this is the challenging reality of the Christian life – but rather that the penalty that sin inflicts, death, has been absolved for those in Christ (Isaiah 53:6, 1 John 2:2, John 1:29). We eagerly wait, with all of creation, to be completely set free from the bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:22).**

**A large part of the inspiration for this article came from the worship song 'This My Soul' By The Gray Havens. It's truly worth a listen and captures Paul's sentiments from Romans 5 and 6 perfectly. This song is one of my personal favourites.**