

So You Want To Follow Jesus?

Maybe you've been thinking you want to follow Jesus and become a Christian, but just aren't sure how to take that step. You *think* you might know what it means *to follow Jesus*, but it'd be good to get some clarity and direction – *what's next?*

Or maybe you've never thought about following Jesus...until now. But something has got you interested, you don't know what exactly, but you want to know – who is this Jesus person your Christian friends at school or uni call 'Lord and Christ'? What does *that* – *Lord and Christ* – even mean?

separated by sin

In my previous article '[A guide for LGBTQ Christian teens](#)', I talked about how much God loves each one of us. He loved the world so much that 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' ([Romans 5:8](#)). You could be thinking, '*sure, that's nice, but what does it mean 'sinners'? I haven't done anything wrong*'.

Sin is not necessarily a hot button topic in our world today. You're more likely to be encouraged to '*live your truth*' than told '*you are a sinner in need of forgiveness*'. If we do stop to think about sin, we probably tend to view it as *really bad things*, like *murder* or *hating on someone* or *lying*. Most of us would probably think of ourselves as *pretty good people*, but the truth is, when compared alongside a completely holy God, we all fall far short of His standard of 'good'.

Sin is not just about specific actions; it also refers to a broken relationship with God and a tendency to stray from His holiness. The reality is that you are separated from God because of your sin, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem.

The Bible describes our situation as being like slaves.

Although humans were created to rule over this world and all the creatures that live in it wisely and well, as God's image-bearers, we gave that up in the Garden of Eden to give our allegiance to someone other than God. We allowed ourselves to be mastered by sin and so became its slaves (2 Peter 2:19).

No doubt this resonates with your own life experiences. Even when you've wanted to do the right thing or tell the truth, we often don't make the right choice in the moment. You've probably done things or made decisions that you now regret but it seemed impossible at the time to choose differently.

But the good news is that God didn't want to leave humanity in a state of brokenness and separation from him. He wanted to fix up the issue of sin, to make a way for us to be forgiven for our mistakes, and to show us the way to live in right relationship with Him.

He sent Jesus to save us, to redirect our lives towards His good and abundant way of living, and to help us see that our true reality, who we *really are*, is *one beloved of God*, intended for glory and greatness.

Lord + Christ

God sent His Son Jesus into the world "not to condemn its people but to save them! Everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die." (John 3:16-17, CEV).

Being saved involves *having faith* in Jesus. So the logical next question is, *who is Jesus?* Who *is* this person that I would put my faith in him? What does it even mean to *put my faith in Jesus?* Great questions!

The best place to start* to learn about who Jesus was is in the New Testament with the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The gospels provide an account of the life, teachings, death,

and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and are foundational texts for understanding His ministry and message. In them, you'll read many amazing stories of what Jesus did, the miracles he performed, who he said he was, the reason why he came, and, finally, the almost unbelievable account of his resurrection from the dead, which validated Jesus' divine identity and his claim to be the Son of God.

The gospel of John comments that *"these [things about Jesus] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

(If you haven't read the gospels for yourself, why not take some time over the next few weeks to read through what they say about Jesus...)

The book of Romans, written by the Apostle Paul, says that "this is the very message about faith we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

He's telling us that *having faith in Jesus* means believing that Jesus is the one that God sent to save us from our sins (*Christ* or *Messiah*, means 'anointed one' (Isaiah 61:1), that Jesus is Lord and therefore has rightful authority over our life, and that he really is the Son of God, as proven by his resurrection from the dead.

The gospels therefore offer both an invitation and a challenge. Do you accept that you need forgiveness, that you are separated from being in right relationship with God? Do you believe Jesus is the one sent into the world to offer that forgiveness and restore you to God? Do you believe that his claim to be the Son of God is true and that he really did rise again from the dead? Do you believe he is Lord of all, just as capable now, as then, of commanding the winds and waves, and will you trust him with the direction of your life?

If the answer is yes to all of these, then *this* is what it means to follow Jesus! This is what it means to be a Christian.

disciples not decisions

Every Christian's life starts at a certain point, with a decision, but that one decision alone is not enough. Following Jesus is a life marked by *discipleship*, which is really just the process of learning to be like Jesus more and more each day. That's a topic I intend to talk more about in a later article.

But following Jesus *does* start with *having faith*: confessing that Jesus is Lord, and believing that God raised him from the dead.

So if this is you, if you find yourself fully convinced about who Jesus is and what he came to do, and that he truly was the Son of God, whom God raised to life again, the Bible says that as soon as you realise this, you should declare your faith publicly by being *baptised* – fully immersed in water.

Baptism is God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based *on their faith* in the work of Jesus Christ. I'll be talking a bit more about that in my next article in this series (Letters To My Kids) so look out for that soon, but if you'd like to chat about baptism in the meantime, I'd love to hear from you!

Let me know your thoughts on this topic (you can message me publicly or privately here or on my socials), or any questions you'd like answers to on this topic (or anything else) in upcoming articles!

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised, and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” – Acts 22:16

* the gospels aren't the only place we read about Jesus. Both the Old Testament and New Testament have a great deal to say about Jesus and who he was! In fact, the promise of Jesus is found in the very first book of the Bible, Genesis. [Here are 55 Old Testament prophecies](#) about Jesus, covering his birth, ministry, death and resurrection, and role in the church.

The Dark Heart Of Christmas

Christmas is a unique time of year.

Traditionally, it's seen as a season of joy, hope, celebration, and family—a chance for many to unwind and find rest as the year draws to a close.

Yet, for others, the story is different. Christmas can be a lonely and isolating season, marked by fractured relationships, the pain of missing loved ones, or financial pressures that overshadow the festivities. It can feel less like a time of rest and more like a whirlwind of exhaustion and unmet expectations.

For many, Christmas is a complex mix of emotions—hopeful yet heavy, joyful yet sorrowful, warm and welcoming but also marked by loneliness and discouragement. It's a time that holds both the brightest lights and the deepest shadows, depending on where one stands.

It seems to me that all these emotions are deeply rooted in the true Christmas story—a story far removed from the sanitised, child-friendly version we often share. Yes, Christmas is a time of hope and celebration as we mark the birth of Jesus Christ. But it's also a season for introspection and solemnity as we reflect on why Jesus came and the profound purpose of His arrival.

Christians are often accused of being overly focused on [sin](#)—and it's true that we sometimes tend to emphasise sin more than the grace that forgives those sins. But sin, and humanity's separation from God, are central to the Christmas story.

Without sin, there would be no need for redemption or reconciliation with God. Without sin, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to come "to save his people" (Matthew 1:21). Without sin, Jesus would not have had to die. At the heart of the Christmas narrative lies a profound hopelessness—a darkness that calls us to pause and reflect.

Jesus | The Hope Of The World

Before there was a baby in a manger, there was a crisis in a garden—a catastrophic severing of humanity's relationship with God. It was a moment that cast a long shadow of darkness over the world and which set the scene for the arrival, many centuries later, of a Saviour. Jesus came as the light that would pierce the darkness, bringing hope and redemption to a world in desperate need of reconciliation with God.

One of my favourite chapters in the Bible is the opening of the Gospel of John. John begins his account of Jesus Christ's origins with words that echo the first chapter of Genesis. He reflects on the darkness present in the beginning—a world without form and void—and reveals how light entered that darkness. That light, John tells us, is Jesus, through whom God's unfailing love and faithfulness has come to humanity. It is through him alone that God has been fully revealed to us.

"Comfort, comfort my people," the prophet Isaiah would write, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins." Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, "Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for

our God! Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places. Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!" | Isaiah 40:1-3

It's Definitely Good News

"Keep it positive," my daughter urged when I mentioned I was writing about the deeper, darker side of Christmas. "Not everything has to be a negative." And I do understand her point. Christmas, with its twinkling lights, joyful songs, and festive feasts, is a season meant for happiness and celebration.

Do we really want to turn our thoughts to more solemn, existential realities? Do children really need to understand *why* Jesus came into the world? Some might say it feels like 'raining on the parade' or being a bit of a party pooper during such a joyful season.

But I think the answer should be yes.

Reflecting on the deeper meaning of Christmas doesn't take away from the celebration—it adds depth and significance. The joy and festivities are wonderful, but they become even more meaningful when we understand the "why" behind them: Jesus came into the world because of God's immense love, to bring light into darkness and offer hope and reconciliation. Christmas is definitely *good news*, but its true significance shines brightest when we understand just how broken things were before it.

For children, this truth doesn't need to feel heavy or complex. Instead, it can be shared as a simple, hope-filled message—that Jesus is the ultimate gift, given to bring peace, love, and joy to the world. Far from lessening the joy of the season, this understanding can make Christmas even more special.

God-With-Us

Christmas celebrates the gift of grace found in Jesus, a gift that came at a great cost. While the festivities—lights, songs, and feasts—bring joy, they are merely the wrappings around this profound truth: Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift, the hope of the world, fulfilling God’s mission to redeem humanity.

John tells us that the light that was in the beginning, the Word Himself, would step in the very creation He had made in order to save and redeem it. In his human body, the war against sin and death would be waged and won.

His name would be Emmanuel, that is, *God-With-Us*, and he would save us from our sins.

*“What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer,
There is no more for Heaven now to give,
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom,
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace” | City Alight*

As we celebrate Christmas, we can embrace both the joy and the meaning of the season. The twinkling lights, festive songs, and shared meals remind us of the happiness this time of year brings. But it’s also an opportunity to reflect on the deeper story—the arrival of Jesus, the true light of the world, who stepped into our darkness to bring grace, redemption, and reconciliation.

At its heart, the Christmas story contains both joy and sorrow, loss and restoration, light and darkness. Christmas is about this extraordinary gift—freely given—and a hope that continues to shine brightly today.

In Him Was Life

New Testament holiness is a joyous privilege, not a heavy burden and duty.

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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Judging // Discerning

It seems to me that it has become increasingly difficult to speak into many issues or situations that the church faces today; not because the Bible is silent, not because the church doesn't have or hasn't held a historical position on a matter, and not because we, as Christians, don't know *what we ought to be doing*. Rather, we are feeling pressed into silence, in many instances, simply on the basis of one little verse found at the beginning of Matthew 7; "*Judge not, that you be not judged*".

This verse, plucked from Matthew's gospel, thrown around *ad voluntatem* by Christians and non-Christians alike, and often applied wildly out of context, is causing widespread paralysis for many Christians and indeed the church, preventing us from being able to affirm and proclaim the reality that Christian life calls us to.

Afraid of being labeled 'judgy', 'divisive', or 'self-righteous', we're clamming up about things we really should be vocal about, choosing silence over sincerity. We're focused on preaching love and acceptance (both good things, by the way), but we're failing to qualify how and what that looks like in a

Christian context.

Not only does there seem to be a growing degree of confusion about the difference between *'judging'*, particularly in the context of Matthew 7, and *'discerning'* for the individual Christian, there also seems to be some confusion about the church's responsibility and role in all this.

Perhaps embarrassed by our failures and our unchristian treatment of both believers and unbelievers in the past, we're now collectively overcompensating by saying nothing at all, reducing the church's critical witness of the name of Jesus, in many instances, to a *'cloud with no rain'*.

Many times, the church actually looks no different on the inside to the way people are living on the outside, as if coming to Christ *changed nothing at all*.

The Christian Ideal

Christians are called to a life of holiness, of renewal and transformation; becoming part of the new creation found in Christ. Christians are those who have accepted the call out of the dominion of darkness, with all its pointless chaos and unfruitful works of darkness, into kingdom life; and the acknowledgment that living God's way, according to His plan and purposes for humanity, is good for us and glorifying to Him.

"You can't read the New Testament without seeing the call to holiness in the Christian life. 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. New Testament holiness enhances life, it never diminishes it." | Lance Ralston

God's way is the benchmark for Christian living, the way we

should aspire to, the truth we ought to affirm. It's referred to often in scripture as *walking in the light, walking with God*, or *walking in the way* and I talk more about this in my article ['Walking With God'](#).

The caveat to this is, of course, that we are *not there yet*. The Christian life is a journey, not an instant transformation. *We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved*. Sanctification, the *'being saved'* part, means we are all a constant work in progress, being renewed and conformed daily into the image of Christ.

What this means, in real terms, is that we will still mess up, sometimes in big ways. These lapses in our Christian walk are stumbles off the path leading us home, deviations from the good way that God has intended for us to live.

While these failures can often be hard to move past, it's important to recognise that they don't need to define us, at least not in a negative way.

We are not that terrible decision we made five years ago, five months ago, or five days ago. We are more than simply the sum of our mistakes. I talk more about this in my article ['Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow'](#).

The joy of Christian life is that sin no longer has the same hold over us as before. We belong to Jesus and his blood cleanses us from all sin. In him, we can find forgiveness and find it many times over.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul the Apostle wants us to comprehend the reality that we are no longer in this battle on our own. He says, *"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully."* (Ephesians 3:18, NLT). God is with us in this fight, empowering us daily through His Spirit and washing us clean in the blood of the

lamb.

What may seem impossible to us is made possible by the love of Christ.

Objective Truth

It feels difficult to write this article without coming off as intolerant, self-righteous, or bigoted. Any time one states a definite opinion on a matter as if that position is the right one, one risks sounding dogmatic and judgmental and I acknowledge it may be no different in this case.

I think our post-modern society has further exaggerated this reality. Our 21st-century culture posits the idea that truth is not absolute and universal (as was once accepted), but rather that our truth *is* truth, even though that truth may be merely subjective and based on or influenced by our own personal feelings, tastes, or opinions.

Conversely, our neighbour's truth, based on or influenced by their personal feelings, tastes, or opinions is also just as true, irrespective of the reality that our two truths may be diametrically opposed to one another.

It's often no longer acceptable to hold to and defend certain views as anything more than being subjectively true, particularly in religious or moral matters.

The Bible cuts through this subjective narrative and states that truth is objective, rooted in the person and character of God Himself. Whatever we hold to be true to the Christian faith has its roots in God (or should, at least), who has been revealed to us in His Word, and which is sufficient to inform our Christian way of life and ethics.

"Every scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice." (2 Timothy 3:16, DR). This is what is meant by *sola scriptura* – that the Bible

is the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice.

As Christians, we believe that biblical truth is not *our* truth and therefore merely subjective, it is God's truth. We hold to the reality that God's truth was demonstrated in Jesus for all humanity to see; and we acknowledge his supremacy and authority over our lives. In doing so we affirm that living God's way is right and true and good.

The question is, what do we do, individually and collectively, when Christian life doesn't look as it should, where there is disregard or apathy toward living God's way, or where it seems that sin is being trivialised, tolerated, or overlooked?

What does the gospel of Matthew mean when it says 'judge not'? Is an individual's responsibility different from that of the collective body, the church? Is it being too judgey to talk about sin?

And how does the church protect the name of Jesus, displaying the glory of God to the nations, in practice?

Judging Or Discerning?

Discerning

I want to make the distinction between discerning and proclaiming what *God's way* is, and judging someone's eternal reality.

Long ago, God intended to use the church as an example of His incredible wealth and grace towards humanity and His intention and plan to bring everything together under Christ, for His own glory. She is imperfect and yet magnificent because the living God is the source of her existence and empowerment. As individuals and collectively, as the church, it is our mandate to preach God's good news to the world and to live as if we believe it to be true.

Paul the Apostle puts it this way: “*Live no longer as the Gentiles do...for they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against Him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasures and eagerly practice every kind of impurity...Put on your new nature, created to be like God-truly righteous and holy.*” (Ephesians 4:17-24, NLT)

He goes on to give several examples of what ‘*being like God looks like*’: no longer lying, no longer using foul language, no longer stealing, no longer engaging in sexual immorality, or being selfish or greedy (amongst other things). He states, ‘with the Lord’s authority’ (v17), that those things are not of God, are not life-giving, and ought not to be pursued by a person professing to be a Christian.

Discerning God’s way of living (‘*carefully determining what pleases the Lord*’ (Ephesians 5:10)), which is intended to be life-giving and good for humanity, is a vitally important element of our Christian discipleship, and, collectively, as a witness to the watching world.

Moral truth exists, vested in the person and character of God Himself, and Christians ought to be preaching and pursuing it with all their hearts, both individually and collectively. To do otherwise is to reject the authority and supremacy of God over our lives.

Judging

Yet, we don’t get it right a lot of the time. Sin no longer has the same hold over us as before, but we still give it plenty of opportunities to gain a foothold in our life.

And too often, we, as individuals, look sideways at our Christian family and privately (or publicly) make bold pronouncements about their *eternal salvation* based on past failures or current struggles. We judge them harshly and with finality in the secret recesses of our hearts, by standards

that we would buckle under ourselves.

We say to ourselves, 'they *may* have found forgiveness with God (though we highly doubt it) but they will never find forgiveness with us or in our church, no matter their repentant heart or confession of failure'.

Matthew warns us about taking such a harsh position of judgment against our Christian brothers and sisters, for with the same inflexible judgment we exact we risk being judged ourselves. If we truly believe and accept the grace God has shown to us, this same grace needed to be demonstrated by a life oriented towards forgiveness to others. I talk more about the implementation of grace in my article '[The White Flag Of Grace](#)' and the necessity of forgiveness in my article '[Forgiveness Is A Tough Gig](#)'.

We need to hold in careful tension the critical reality of the eternal consequences of not living God's way, of choosing a way that is not life-giving, resolutely naming sin and the need for repentance, alongside the reality that Christians still mess up and that forgiveness is always possible with God and should be practiced between individuals and within the church.

(In saying that, there are often consequences that flow from our actions which may negatively impact our life moving forward, particularly in relation to our ministry or relationships in the church. These consequences are often complex, requiring wise pastoral care and support to work through.)

We are not to judge one another's *eternal salvation* based on past or present struggles but neither are we to overlook our calling to holiness and the orienting of our lives toward God.

What Is The Church's Responsibility?

The Apostle Paul dealt with some real doozy situations in his letters. Take, for example, the situation in the church in Corinth; a case of sexual immorality not even heard of among 'pagans' (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). A believer in the church was boldly and proudly 'living in sin' with his stepmother, or, as some translations have it, his father's wife.

Paul is horrified at such a situation and tells the church that, collectively, they ought to be in mourning in sorrow and shame. Such things ought not to be even named among the people of God, let alone practiced (Ephesians 5:3).

The letter to the Corinthians is a very confronting letter, in many respects. Paul leaves no room for doubt as to what he thinks about the situation and what the church must do. He (shockingly) tells them that they must remove the man from their fellowship. *"You must call a meeting of the church. I will be present with you in spirit, and so will the power of our Lord Jesus. Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns."*

He continues, *"In my other letter, I told you not to have anything to do with immoral people. But **I wasn't talking about the people of this world.** You would have to leave this world to get away from everyone who is immoral or greedy or who cheats or worships idols. I was talking about **your own people** who are immoral or greedy or worship idols or curse others or get drunk or cheat. **Don't even eat with them!** Why should I judge outsiders? **Aren't we supposed to judge only church members?** God judges everyone else. The Scriptures say, "Chase away any of your own people who are evil." (1 Corinthians 5:4-9)*

It's very clear, the church is not to sit in judgment of the world, that's God's prerogative. But we are to collectively

judge the conduct and witness of the church to which we belong (essentially, the whole body is responsible for judging the whole body) and leave no space for evil to grow, unchecked. For those Christians who are unrepentant and proudly indulging in sin, the church isn't even to eat with such people (1 Corinthians 5:11).

(It's important to note here that one church is not at liberty to sit in judgment of another. A local church has oversight over its own members, not over another church. The authority to remove a lampstand of Jesus or determine whether a lampstand should be removed from its place of influence belongs to the King alone (Revelation 2:5). No person or group should dare presume such authority over Jesus' church and its local expressions.)

Yet the church can sometimes be too hasty in pronouncing judgment. Paul clearly differentiates in other places in scripture between those Christians who are *indulging in sin* (1 Corinthians 5:9) and those who find themselves *caught in transgression* (Galatians 6:1). His pastoral advice regarding the response to each is different, despite both being issues of 'sin'. An important element of church discipline is to sensitively and accurately establish the nature of a situation, before deciding how the church ought to proceed.

Restoring

First and foremost, we are ambassadors of the great ministry of reconciliation; of pointing to the work of Christ, and our great need for forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

We are part of God's great mission of restoration and redemption and this reality should be at the forefront of any response to sin in the church.

The church has a responsibility to make sure that we are accurately representing Jesus to the world; preaching the necessary call to holiness of the Christian life whilst

acknowledging we are not yet made perfect and we still mess up.

We ought to seek first, on every occasion and at every opportunity, to restore a person who has *wandered away from truth*. We pray for them and with them, we remind them of the realities of the gospel, of the forgiveness found in Jesus, and of the healing warmth of God's light.

We love them, we accept their struggle with sin as something common to us all, and yet we encourage them not to shrink back from Christ in shame but rather to turn to him anew in humble confession and repentance.

One of the most powerful and eternally significant things a church can do is to rescue one who has fallen into sin. "*My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.*" (James 5:19-20)

Discipleship within the local church means that each member acknowledges they are part of the body, a body that collectively has the authority to declare who belongs to Jesus and the responsibility of teaching, caring for, correcting, loving, and disciplining its members.

The church, therefore, *affirms a person's profession of faith in Jesus and gives oversight to that individual's discipleship*, and, in turn, the individual *submits his or her discipleship to the care and oversight of the church and commits themselves in service to the building up of the church*. It's a symbiotic-esque relationship referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 as '*one another-ing*'.

Protecting

Unfortunately, as the case in the church at Corinth

demonstrates, there will be some who are completely unrepentant, who *'make a practice of sinning'* (1 John 5:18), and who reject the pursuit of holiness that Christians are called to. These people *"are ungodly men and women, saying that God's marvellous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."* (Jude 1:4)

An individual Christian is not responsible for overseeing another Christian's membership in the body of Christ, but the church, made up of all its members is. It's how the church protects the name of Jesus.

"Church discipline, then, is fundamentally about love. The Lord disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:6). The same is true for his church. Love in the Bible is holy. It makes demands. It yields obedience. It doesn't delight in evil but rejoices in the truth." (1 Corinthians 13:6) | Jonathan Leeman

"But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good – crucified. Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives." | Galatians 5:22-25 MSG

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

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

John Writes A Letter

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day – our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life – fear of death, fear of judgment – is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love – love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first. If anyone boasts, “I love God,” and goes

right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." – 1 John 4:17-21, MSG

Authentic Christianity

Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.

John's words on this subject are blunt and straight to the point. *"You cannot be a Christian and hate other people"*. It's incompatible and hypocritical. Not only that, it's a blatant subversion of everything that is intrinsically bound up in a Christian's salvation by God's grace. We love God, because He **first** loved us and, despite our complete unworthiness, He sent His son to die for us. There is no greater love than a man dying for his friends, and there could be no greater demonstration of what love looks like, to die, even for those who were your enemies.

"What marvellous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it – we're called children of God!" – 1 John 3:1, MSG

Of all the people on this earth, it would seem obvious that Christians would understand the implications of this. We are the recipients of a love so deep and vast and completely undeserving, it should be impossible for us to not respond to this in our relationships with others. We haven't received from God what we should have. And what we shouldn't have received, we have. Grace, freely given, has been demonstrated by a love lavished on us in abundance. This recognition of grace should empower and transform us to demonstrate the same kind of love in all our relationships, and especially to our Christian family.

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.

“The one who won’t practice righteous ways isn’t from God, neither is the one who won’t love a brother or sister.” – 1 John 3:10, MSG

Are We Really Born Again?

There’s a serious crisis amongst Christians. It seems we can talk a lot about love, but we’re actually woefully inadequate at demonstrating it. Instead of showing real, authentic love, demonstrated in graceful, multi-faceted ways, we see the opposite in many of our Christian communities. We’re often religiously wealthy but morally bankrupt; devoid of any real expression of a grace-led life. We say we’re born again but are we really? Has grace really touched our hearts?

Jesus told a story to illustrate what a life untransformed by grace looks like – 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. In fact, there is a direct connection 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](#)

What Does Real Love Look Like?

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, ESV

These are all attributes of a life that is lived walking with God; [led by the Spirit](#). The implications of a Spirit-led life find their way into every aspect of our lives: affection for others, understanding and compassion for their failings, forgiveness of their mistakes (and our own!), confidence in God’s love and kindness, a commitment to cultivate close and loving relationships built on mutual respect and sacrifice.

These are attributes of a person who has fully grasped the weight and implications of saving grace and whose life is

being transformed, day by day, following the example of the One who went before – Jesus Christ. They are choosing every day to put aside the unfruitful works of darkness and to walk in the Spirit, producing the fruit that comes from living God’s way (Galatians 5). The bright light of Christ makes their way plain.

Hate Will Destroy Us

The opposite of love is hate. And let’s get real. Hate, in all its forms, whether displayed passively or aggressively, is like a poison that destroys our soul. It will ruin our life – and not just ours. It causes havoc in our families, our relationships, our churches and, critically, to our witness of the Gospel. We may think that we have never been guilty of ‘hating our brother or sister’, but when we harbour bitterness in our heart, when we gossip about them to others, when we withhold doing good on the basis of preference, when we are angry at them, when we don’t treat them with dignity and honour, ‘esteeming all better than ourselves’, we are hating them.

So heinous is the position of hate before God that John says that a person who hates is said to be walking in darkness and not the light ([1 John 2:9, 11](#)). It’s entirely possible for a person to continue professing religion but remain at enmity with their Christian brother or sister. The Bible states unapologetically that such a person is a liar ([1 John 4:20](#)).

They may fool everyone else but they cannot fool God.

Hate Is An Issue Of The Heart

We need to be on our guard in our Christian communities that we are not unwittingly or, worse, complicit in allowing lives to be ruled by hate, in all its insidious forms. While we may be vocal on what are perceived to be more serious sins (such as murder or immorality), we tend to overlook or excuse things

like slander, gossip, envy, enmity, strife, jealousy, bitter disagreements, divisions or backbiting. Do we speak against these things and model a better way? We are all capable of such things and we are all responsible for preventing the spiritual disease that results from overlooking these things in our Christian communities.

We are warned over and over in the Bible of how hatred and bitterness can destroy us. We are encouraged to love one another, keep short records of wrongs, and forgive others, not harbouring bitterness or anger in our hearts.

We know that all these issues find their source in the darkness of the human heart.

“For from within the hearts of people come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery.” – Mark 7:21, ESV

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. – Ephesians 4:31, ESV

When we struggle with issues like gossip, slander, bitterness, anger or envy, the problem lies inside us, deep in the recesses of our heart. The issue is not with the person at whom our hate is directed but with us. And if it were not a problem that all Christians face, the many writers of the epistles, especially John, wouldn't have taken the time to warn us of it.

If we can't love our Christian brother or sister, then, quite simply, we don't [understand grace](#).

How Can We Change The Narrative?

The imperative first step for anyone struggling with these issues is to spend some time considering God's grace and work of salvation in their life. Make it personal. Consider what it

meant for God to give His Son for you, that you might live. Consider the weight of your guilt and inability to fully satisfy God's righteousness, and comprehend the fact that, in Jesus, you are forgiven and set free, fully reconciled and made right with God.

Perhaps you don't truly believe this to be true for yourself and this is the root cause of your fear and judgment of others. Make it a priority to [find peace and true reconciliation](#) with the God who is for you and not against you. Allow the dark places of your heart to be flooded with the light of Jesus. Ask for God to soften your heart, for Him to remove the bitterness, envy and hate. Confess to Him how ashamed you are of allowing that root of bitterness to grow and ask Him to help you prune it from your life.

And, as Christian communities, we must all love enthusiastically, hating sin but loving the sinner, remembering that we were all at one time enemies of God. We must not tolerate those things that allow hate or division to flourish but show our faith by cultivating [works of the Spirit](#), against which there is no law! (Galatians 5:22-24).

*"So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus."
– 2 Peter 1:5-9, MSG*

"Anyone who claims to be intimate with God, ought to live the kind of life that Jesus lived." | 1 John 2:6, MSG

A Powerful Witness To The Truth Of Jesus Christ

Jesus tells his disciples in John 13:35, that by loving one another as he has loved them, all the world will know that they are his disciples. *The world will see your love for each other and know, without even having to ask, that you are followers of the King.* How we love, as Christians, therefore, is either a powerful witness to the truth and reality of the risen King and our allegiance to him; or a public denial of our belief in the King and his ability to truly transform our hearts. By not loving as the King loves, we demonstrate for all to see that the *ruler of this world* still controls us; that we are allowing this rule to flourish in our lives and govern our actions towards others.

Real faith in the King is more than the words we say, the emotions we feel, ideas we debate or a truth we believe. Real faith is something we do; expressed in visible ways, deeply rooted in and flowing from this focused centre; that “one man died for everyone.” Real faith shows up in our life – particularly in the way that we love the King’s people.

‘Sometimes called “the Proverbs of the New Testament”, the book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians exactly how to live so as to be compelling witnesses for the name of Jesus Christ. From perseverance to true faith to controlling one’s tongue, submitting to God’s will, and having patience, this book aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ.

Many have claimed that James and the Apostle Paul differed on the question of faith versus works, but in reality, the spiritual fruit that James talks about simply demonstrates the true faith of which Paul wrote.’ (taken from the introduction to James, ESV 2000). *If you claim to be a Christian, James says, **prove it by your actions.***

The kind of faith that is real, saving faith is shown to be vital, living and demonstrable in action. Depending on God and accepting His gift of grace – truly accepting it – will radically transform our lives. It will challenge everything we do, our belief systems and possibly even misplaced prejudices about others. It will compel us to behave justly to others, with impartiality, even though the world around us might not be just or impartial. It will compel us to do better and be better, not so that we ‘earn God’s favour’ but so that our faith can be seen as a reality, not just a matter of empty words.

Awareness of, and responding to the love of God is at the heart of our Christian lives. We are who we are, first and foremost, because of God revealed in Christ. Yet if our ‘loving union with God’ doesn’t result in a living faith, shown by our good works to others, then, as [1 John 4:7-21](#) says so eloquently, our love for God **simply isn’t real**. This kind of faith is a counterfeit Christianity and nothing more than a corpse.

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David’s Story: God Sees The Heart Of Us

[David](#), the shepherd boy-turned-king and famous author of the Psalms, is perhaps one of the most complex characters in the Bible. At times, he displays examples of great faith, leadership and spirituality. Yet, these admirable qualities are often starkly contrasted against the deplorable choices

and wicked actions for which he was responsible.

How can God have cause to say of him *“I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who will do all my will.”* (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22)? How could God say this about a man whose actions at times seemed deeply in contrast to the will and character of God himself?

Examining the **why** of this statement tells us so much about how God really sees us and, in turn, how we should see ourselves.

God See Beyond The Valleys

In the vast landscape that is our life, there are moments of grandeur, like lofty mountain peaks. And yet there are valleys too, times when we find ourselves in low and desperate places. These are the times when we find ourselves making poor choices or bad decisions or, like David, being responsible for actions that are completely wrong and offensive to God.

Among the list of David’s failures is found adultery (2 Samuel 11:4) and murder (2 Samuel 11:15). He was less than an exemplary example as a father (2 Samuel 13:15-22), and at times, as a king. It could be difficult to see what God saw or loved about this man, when collating the different snapshots of his life.

It seems contradictory that the very thing that God commended David for – his heart – is the very place in which these evil choices find their root.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts: murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” – Matthew 15:19, NLT

Yet God sees beyond the valleys. He deciphers the intentions of our heart and looks past the lapses in our spirituality or even those sins we find most heinous. In a certain sense, our

mistakes matter less than our motivations. He is more interested in who we can become than in who we are now and this is exactly what He saw in David, the potential and the will to **do** better and to **be** better.

This is why He was able to look into David's heart and see something of Himself there.

That David was considerably flawed is unquestionable. His love for God, however, is not. His ability to be deeply touched by truth and show genuine remorse for his wrongdoings is what God loved about him. That he **wanted** to do right, even though he often didn't, is what God took notice of. He displayed a truly penitent response when confronted with the reality of his decisions and his many psalms are evidence of his beautiful, contrite spirit.

Despite Our Flaws, God Still Loves Us

The Bible doesn't seek to gloss over David's mistakes. He could have been easily painted in quite a different light; recorded for history as a glowing example of virtue and goodness. Yet he wasn't and that, in itself, is telling.

God wants us to learn something very important from David's life, his choices and his mistakes. God wants us to learn that despite all our flaws and weaknesses or even despite the worst things we may have done, God is able to see into our hearts and love us for who we really are.

We see God's love displayed in the most ultimate way by the provision of His son as the saviour of mankind. God didn't send His son to die for a world of righteous men and women. In actuality, God knew how deeply flawed the human race was, yet still He sent [Jesus](#) to die for humanity. He knew what we **could** become and what He hoped we **would** become, and that was enough.

"For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. It is rare indeed for anyone to

die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:5-7, NIV

Does this mean that we can do what we like, because God loves us anyway? Not at all. Paul the Apostle answers this question in Romans 6:1-2 where he says *“Of course not! How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it?”*

Just because God will forgive us, doesn't mean we should provide Him endless opportunity! Just because God's gift of grace has been given, doesn't mean we should abuse it.

Choices And Consequences

Did David “get away with” the terrible things he did, just because God loved him? Absolutely not. God's universal law of choice and consequence, established in Eden, still played out in David's life.

David suffered great loss, political instability, serious dysfunction within his family and heartbreaking betrayal by his peers, as a direct result of his actions. God didn't shield him from these or remove them from his life, even though He certainly had the power to do so.

Just like David, we are [responsible for the consequences of our choices](#) and must learn to live with them. Yet, we can be confident that God can see to the heart of us too. That He is still working in our lives, despite our failures, to [bring us to Him](#). And that He alone assesses our motives.

“All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.” Proverbs 16:2, NKJV

How Should We See Ourselves?

It's very easy to judge ourselves from the valley floor. We may be living with deep regrets about choices and decisions we've made in the past. We may feel judged by others and feel that no-one really knows us or understands our motives. We may even doubt God's love for us and His ability to forgive us.

The deeply personal message of the Bible is that God **does** love us. He doesn't judge us on our moments of failure or weakness – He knows and understands that we're human. He surveys the landscape of our life, both the highs and lows and is able to weigh that all in the balance, seeing to the heart of who we really are.

“Then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart)” – 1 Kings 8:39, NIV

God doesn't want us to remain in the valleys. He is ready and willing to help us climb out of them. We have a remarkable gift of grace and forgiveness offered to us, through Jesus, and it is God's power in our lives that can bring us up from the valley floor and on to the mountain heights. Like David, our hearts will sing the song of ascent:

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1-2

Paul the Apostle likens the gift of grace to treasure in jars of clay. This treasure is God's glorious light that has shone in our hearts, illuminating what lies within and giving us the

light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's grace that teaches our hearts to trust God and relieves our fears. And it's grace that will lead us home. Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound! How precious it is!

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” 1
Corinthians 4:7

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People Of The Kingdom

[Deciding to become a Christian](#) has its origins in believing the things about Jesus, certainly, in an intellectual sense; who he is and what he came for – but there's more to it than that. We are also choosing to surrender to his guidance and leadership in our life as a willing subject of God's designated king.

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he becomes the first claimant on our affections, 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).

Becoming a Christian is, therefore, primarily a matter of the heart; a reorienting of our life and decisions in line with our allegiance to the king.

The People Of The Kingdom

An intrinsic part of our identity as Christians is to recognise that we have given our allegiance to the king and that we have been transferred into his kingdom (Colossians 1:13). This kingdom's advancement, day by day in the lives of those who surrender to King Jesus, is demonstrated in a kingdom community that we call 'the church'. **The church is the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom of God.** Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that *"are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity"* (Ecclesiastes 3:11) (Matter Of The Heart)

Yet, for many Christians, the 'kingdom of God' is something that takes place solely in the future. Jesus' words *"the kingdom is near"* (Luke 17:20-21) are understood to mean, in reality, "the kingdom is coming at some later time, that time being hundreds or even thousands of years away". The idea of 'the kingdom' is as a future hope for faithful Christians, only realised at the return of Jesus, and not as a present reality. Entrance to this 'kingdom' (in the future) is by believing in Jesus now, receiving the forgiveness of sins in baptism, and then living a morally faithful life; and this is commonly described and preached as 'the gospel of good news' (in its entirety). In other words, *"I am a sinner. I need saving. I believe Jesus came to save me. In Jesus, I am forgiven (I hope! – one can never be too sure) and I hope to be in 'the kingdom', at some point in the future (again, all going well)."*

Yet the kingdom of God – the sovereignty and rule of God – has always existed and will always exist (Psalm 47:7, 1 Chronicles 29:11, Exodus 15:18, Psalm 103:19). 'The kingdom' existed in the past, it exists now and it will exist in the future. Our hope, as Christians, is not just some distant, far-off expectation but a reality that exists right now as we choose

to yield to Jesus' rule and live 'kingdom lives' under his dominion. Believing in Jesus and being baptised doesn't just grant us forgiveness of sins; through God's grace, we also receive an entirely new identity; our small, individual stories becoming part of the much bigger story that is being told. We become kingdom people right now! (Matthew 13:38, Philippians 3:20-21, Ephesians 2:19).

Five Things That Make A Kingdom

Kingdom = King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land. Here are some thoughts about the idea of 'kingdom' in the Bible:

1. A **kingdom** is a people governed by a KING. The king is God; He has always been king, ruling firstly through *theocracy*, then by *monarchy* and now through *christocracy*. The kingdom of God, therefore, has gone through many phases, one of which was the phase exhibited during the time of Israel's monarchy. A reasonable chunk of the Old Testament is dedicated to the telling of this story. You can [read more about this in the article 'Jesus, King Of The World'](#).
2. The king must RULE over the **kingdom**. In biblical language, this is always firstly redemptive, and then secondly by governing.
3. There has to be PEOPLE for there to be a **kingdom**. In the Old Testament (OT), this was the nation/**kingdom of Israel**. But Israel, like a tree, has deep roots and grafted-in branches, seen in the New Testament (NT) to be the church (which does not replace Israel but expands it) (Romans 11:1-28).
4. A **kingdom** must have a governing LAW. In OT times, this was achieved through the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses. When Jesus (God's perfect king) arrived, he didn't destroy this law but fulfilled it completely, and by his life, death and resurrection, a greater law came into being – the Law of Cruciformity; loving as Jesus loved. Jesus stated that the entire law of the new covenant, the law which governs people of the kingdom, is summarised in these words "Love the Lord

your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love others as much as you love yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-40, CEB)

5. A **kingdom** must have a LAND. Land is big in the OT and moving into the NT, we see the ‘tree of the kingdom’ expanding to (eventually) encompass the whole world (Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:3-32). In the past, this has been, at various phases, in literal places like the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel. But right now, ‘the land’ is wherever ‘the church’ (the community of kingdom people) takes up physical space. Wherever kingdom people reside, God, in Jesus, rules. One day, this kingdom will fill all the earth and God’s rule and glory will be seen in all things – as He intended from the beginning (Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 6:10, Revelation 21: 1, 4)

This reality – that church people are kingdom people – is one of the most ***exciting and empowering aspects of a Christian’s existence in this life*** – we are living for the king! So why don’t we talk much about kingdom living or being kingdom people? And why don’t we speak more often of the church as the kingdom community?

Soteriology: “Small-Story” Gospel

Well, here’s what I think the reason might be. For many Christians, the gospel of “the good news of the kingdom of God” (which, incidentally, is what Jesus came preaching!) has unfortunately been reduced to simply a system of personal salvation and sin management. It has become a **gospel of soteriology alone**; a doctrine of salvation which has somehow become disconnected from the larger big-story **gospel of ecclesiology**; **theology about the nature and structure of the church**.

The truth is; when we are saved by Jesus, God also brings us into family and puts us in community! The gospel is not just about our own personal salvation but includes larger theological implications of ecclesiology – that Christian

people, gathered together, are church people, who are kingdom people!

“The movement that has long called itself “Evangelical” is in fact better labelled “Soterian.” That is, we have thought we were talking about “the gospel” when in fact we were concentrating on “salvation.” | Scot McKnight

If we have a small-story gospel understanding, our trajectory as a Christian may go something like this: we (individually) repent, we (individually) are then baptised...and then life gets kind of weird for a lot of Christians. We're saved – but what now?

At this point, Christians can become obsessed with getting other unbelievers 'over the line' (saved!) but still aren't really sure what to do with them after that. Our Christian lives seem mostly about sin management (ourselves or for others) and we can tend to also be a little self-absorbed in this. All we know of 'gospel' is that we're sinners who need saving. Others are sinners who need saving. 'Christian living' (gospel living) is only about being, firstly, saved from sin and then executing a moral life thereafter.

Christianity can take a sudden and exhausting turn into the territory of works-based living, eventually leading to [church burnout](#) and, for many Christians, [the question of whether church-going is even relevant anymore](#).

Don't get me wrong. **Sin is absolutely a problem for us, as is mortality.** It is the thing that separates us from a whole relationship with God and absolutely needs addressing in our individual lives as well as in the collective human experience (Isaiah 59:2, Isaiah 53:6, Acts 3:19, Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 5: 12-21, Hebrews 7:25).

But the problem with thinking the gospel is only about personal salvation or forgiveness of sins is that we fail to

recognise we are being invited into something much bigger than just a solution for our own individual stories. When we receive the good news of the gospel, our little stories are actually becoming intertwined and woven into God's larger kingdom story. We are supposed to begin experiencing life, personally and collectively, as people of the kingdom, connected to something that extends far into eternity. The fascinating reality of the gospel is that *"we are invited into a story that is bigger than our culture, bigger even than our own imaginations, and yet we get to experience it and tell that story to others with the particularity of our own moment and place in time"* (Rachel Held Evans).

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

When we become a Christian, we become a kingdom person, living in a fellowship with other kingdom people. Church isn't just something we go to, it's the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom. Church isn't just an event we attend, it's a fellowship we belong to. It's the Fellowship of the King! (1 John 1:3, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9)

A New Day In An Old Story

While our individual salvation is absolutely bound up in what we have come to describe as the gospel, the good news that was preached in the first century had its roots in a much older, much larger story, that of the long-promised king and saviour of the world. The power of Jesus' sacrifice and the wonder of

[his resurrection](#) form the foundation of a Christian's faith and hope but it is the fact that Jesus is **the Christ** ("the anointed one"), that is at the heart of the gospel (2 Timothy 2:8). Our forgiveness and redemption sits inside this much larger gospel message – that of the rule and dominion of the king. Recognising the gospel as "the good news of the kingdom of God" (which, in the gospel of Matthew is also called the kingdom of heaven) helps correct our gospel theology and realign it to the larger story that's being told. **You are part of a much bigger story than your personal salvation alone!**

Author Scot McKnight argues that Western Christians conceive 'the kingdom' too individualistically.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God's kingdom is defined in terms of God's people. This reality means that one may not put the kingdom and the church in antithesis. On the contrary, "you can't be kingdom people without being church people". McKnight, in fact, claims that "there is no kingdom now outside the church" and that "there is no kingdom mission that is not church mission" (The King Jesus Gospel pages 79, 87, 96). Kingdom living consists, then, of the church being the church – "liv[ing]" together "as a fellowship under King Jesus" (p.99). | Scot McKnight

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

"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From

the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” | Matthew 11:11, NASB

“From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” | Matthew 4:17, NIV

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, Repent and believe in the good news! | Mark 1:15, NIV

“Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” | Luke 17:20-21, NASB

The Significance Of “The Kingdom”

“To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to a statistical analysis. The term *basileia* (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven” occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. “After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. **It insists that we are saved for a purpose.**” – SBC Life

'Kingdom redemption' is the work of God, through Jesus, and by virtue of his sin-solving cross and new-life creating resurrection, unleashed to those who are needy because of their sins. Any kind of "redemptive" activity that does not deal with sin, that does not find strength in the cross, that does not see the primary agent as Jesus, and that does not see it all as God's new creation life unleashed is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and good and for the common good. | Scot McKnight

The kingdom of God is more than social justice or personal salvation. 'The kingdom' is the promise of God from the beginning to fill the earth with Himself and to rule justly in the hearts and lives of all humanity. It includes the promise of total reconciliation with humanity; only made possible in Jesus (Ephesians 1:11-12, 1 Timothy 1:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 4:11, Romans 11:36, Revelation 1:16).

And if we want to know how Jesus understands the collective Christian life – 'church life' – the place to begin is with what he called the kingdom of God. When we think of the church – the one body of Christ, the community of believers, we need to understand how this connects in tangible, relatable ways to the 'kingdom of God' and how we see this illustrated in the people of the kingdom today. A true and full telling of the gospel must include the reality of the church, not as individuals gathered together in a building but as a kingdom of people – priests, rulers and images bearers on behalf of the King – King Jesus.

"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" | Colossians 1:13, ESV

Author's Note: This article should in no way be taken to imply that 'the kingdom of God' is merely spiritual. Jesus' context was, clearly, the nation of Israel and historical implications are at work for these people who had been chosen to be God's witnesses. The idea of 'the kingdom of God' was certainly consistent with the Jewish hope of a saviour and the arrival of the one who would be the 'consolation of Israel'. 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.

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

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

"And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." Isaiah 11:12, NASB

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

"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

There are many layers to God's great story, which finally

converge in Jesus. "Jesus is all of Israel's major leaders and more, he's a new Moses and especially a new David and a new Solomon and a new servant and a new son of man and whole new redemptive order. His name – *Yeshua* – means 'he will save his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21). The story is that in Jesus God now rules and God's kind of ruling is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, and reconciling." (Scot McKnight)