

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.

Loving The Church

“You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour.” | James 3:18, MSG

Loving the church can be hard.. Frankly, at times, she can seem like a big, fat disappointment.

Infighting. Divisions. The failure of leaders and the apathy of congregants. The assimilation to culture. A preoccupation with prestige and power. Intolerance. Liberality.

Sometimes the church is hard to love.

“It is clear that the church regularly breaks our hearts, disappoints, and even damages us. Both history and our current headlines reveal a church that can be a deeply flawed, sinful, and unhealthy institution, marred by acts of injustice, corruption, abuse, misogyny, and oppression. The contemporary [American] church is wrecked with bickering and division, celebrity worship and unaccountable leaders, false and shallow teaching, and a Christian industrial complex formed around greed and vanity.” | Tish Harrison, A Church Called Tov

Negative experiences often lead people to ‘give up on church’. They decide they will ‘follow Jesus’ but reject the church. Their solution: to walk an individual and untroubled path, to become a solitary lighthouse bravely resisting the wild seas alone.

And I get it. I do.

It's an unsettling reality that many people who've left the church and moved away from Christian community have suffered real disappointment and hurt at the hands of the church. For many, their view of the church has been (justifiably) tarnished by their negative experiences within it.

People can be very wounded by the church, unfortunately, because it's made up of imperfect people who often mess up.

But here's the rub.

We are the church.

All of us, together, collectively, communally.

There's not *ourselves* and then, over there, *the church*. There's not *me*, in my own personal little faith bubble, and then, over there, the raging, incompetent screw-up of a *church* that I, personally, have no connection to (and neither do I want to).

There aren't *some Christians* who just love doing church and other Christians who, well, it's just *really not their thing*.

'An individual Christian does not a church make.'

We are the church

Christianity is, by definition, collective, and communal. There is no church, without all of us.

Too often we separate out Jesus and 'the church' in our minds as if they're two different identities. We say we love Jesus but we're less enthusiastic about his people.

But the church is Jesus' body. Loving Jesus means loving the church too. It's part of him and he's part of it. He died for the church, for his people, and it's in his death and resurrection that we are brought together in community.

Jesus said that he would build his church, purchased with his own blood, and of which he is the chief cornerstone (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:28, Ephesians 2:20). His language is organic, inclusive, and corporate. He is in the house-building business and we are each his individual stones, selected and fitted together, according to his good pleasure (1 Peter 2:5).

We therefore can't say we love Jesus but we hate his people/body... it's simply incongruous.

Loving the church isn't an optional extra to our life of faith. It's an intrinsic part of it, with all its joy, pain, and disappointment. She is us and we are her.

3 Reasons To Love The Church:

1. Because Jesus Asked Us To (And Because He Loves Her)

Jesus brings real people, diverse and divided in life, into common union together, into relationship, into the messy, untidy reality that is the church, not because they are worthy, but because Jesus died for them and that is enough.

It's around the Passover table, over the first Christian communion, and right before Jesus was betrayed, sentenced to death, and then crucified, that he gives his disciples a new commandment to live by once he is gone.

"...love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." | John 13:34-35, ESV

By loving one another as he has loved us, all the world will know that we 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.

Love isn't always easy, but it is the more excellent way. And it's the way that Jesus has asked us to take.

First, we were loved, now we love.

Sure, we will have to work at it at times (and 1 Corinthians 13 is full of pastoral advice on how to go about this) but, quite simply, loving each other – loving the church – is what Jesus has asked us to do.

He loves her and he wants us to love her too.

2. Because The Church Is The Hope Of The World (Despite Her Flaws)

Around that communion table, Jesus could see the seeds of the church – his church – that was soon to be born. His small band of followers represented the expansive and diverse family that God would build through him, for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

"You are my ambassadors", Jesus had told them, "and behold, I am with you, even until the end of time." (Matthew 28:20).

From the dark soil of an empty tomb, the seeds of Jesus' church sprang forth, bringing new life and hope.

The church – full of saved sinners – is the place that tells of God's goodness and faithfulness, and His enduring love for humanity.

The church is the place that speaks hope, shining the light of the gospel into a dark world.

The church is the place where broken and damaged people find healing and redemption, basking in the warmth of God's radical grace.

The church is the heart of God's kingdom mission, spilling over into the world and showing that a different way is

possible: life that gives life, in abundance.

We love the church because, despite her flaws, she is the hope of the world, the place where people finally come home.

3. Because We Were Made For God's Community

We were made for community and we grow and are nurtured in community. (Yes, we are wounded in community but it's also in community that we heal. *"Healing might not come from the community where the wounding took place, but community is needed for healing nonetheless."* | Rich Villodas)

It was in the very beginning that God said, 'let us make humanity in our image and after our likeness.' To be with God and to be like God, together: this is what we were made for and the purpose of human existence. This is why we all feel that deep longing to belong, why we continually search for meaning in the mundane. God has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

We aren't really 'Christian' in its fullest sense unless we're doing life together within the God-community we were created for. Otherwise, we're just like a random toe or finger, disconnected from a body and essentially useless (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) (in this analogy, that is; please don't read that to be saying 'you are useless'!).

The Apostle Paul has this to say about the body of Christ: *"A body is made up of many parts, and each of them has its own use. That's how it is with us. There are many of us, but we each are part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another."* (Romans 12:4-5, CEV)

Each one of us, brought together, makes up the body and, as Ephesians 5:29 comments, "None of us hate our own bodies. We provide for them and take good care of them, just as Christ does for the church."

This is what we were made for! Relationship with God and relationship with His people. Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that are “connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

We love the church because she is the community of God.

Finally...

Sometimes the church can feel hard to love. Sometimes we rub up against people who don't exactly show Jesus as we think he ought to be seen. *Sometimes we are those people.*

But for those who have been disillusioned by the church, please know that she is full of people who really are the real deal; people who love Jesus, love his people, and are working every day in his kingdom mission with sincerity and authenticity. I know, because I've met them!

So, don't give up hope in the church, in finding your place in it, and in loving her, despite her flaws.

She is us.

We are the church.

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Heaven + Earth: The End Of

The Story

Inarguably, it's the end of any story that's the most important part.

While the beginning of a tale gives context and setting, and the middle gives the story its shape and drama, it's the ending that provides meaning and gives resolution to the narrative. It's the ending that makes sense of everything, that allows all the intersecting threads of drama, intrigue, risk, loss, joy, and homecoming to find their place and purpose within the story and, particularly, in its overarching conclusion.

Humanity's story; an ongoing tale of love and war, victory and defeat, joy and tragedy, has not yet reached its conclusion, but, surprisingly, its ending *has already been written*.

While scientists and philosophers have had much to offer to the conversation about our origins and humanity's remarkable traverse through history, with all of our astonishing achievements, they have little to offer on the subject of where we might all be going or how our story finishes. When it comes to science, we are left largely in the dark about the questions that matter the most.

What are we here for?

What is the purpose of life?

Where will we end up?

Life's Most Profound Questions

It's to the Bible alone that we can turn for answers to life's most profound questions. It has much to say about not just how we supposedly got here and why, but also how humanity's story will reach its epic conclusion.

The Bible is the living, Spirit-breathed Word of God, the written revelation of what God has been doing in the past, what He is still doing right now, and what he has intended for the future of humanity.

The Word of God is like a vast tapestry, its main theme interwoven with many sub-plots and side stories that run like golden threads through an intricate design. Each of these threads complements the complete telling of God's story and confirm again and again to us the way in which God views the world, the people who inhabit it, and how important each one of us are to Him.

Far from being just black text on white pages; this book unveils the purpose, intentionality, and creative action of the Eternal One; breathed out, captured by way of quill and scroll by the faithful scribes who heard 'the voice of God', recording the Eternal's story for all to read.

What we also learn about God's story is that the master storyteller hasn't been absent or detached from His story, but fully present and, in fact, His full, enveloping presence, His close and intimate dwelling with humanity was actually the point of the story all along. What began in a garden, where God once [walked with us](#), will find its epic conclusion in a 'new creation', in a restored and regenerated earth where God at last dwells with His people.

The end of our story will actually be *our new beginning*. The conclusion of our story doesn't end with us going to be with God; but *with God coming to earth*, returning, at last, *to be with us*.

God's story has a conclusion, an ending, a moment when all the loose strings are neatly tied up and we'll sit back, with a sigh of satisfaction at a tale well told and an ending more glorious than we could ever have imagined.

The Purpose Of God

Much of scripture is given to expressing the heart of the Creator and what His hopes and dreams were for this place we call Earth, along with us, its inhabitants, as His intended image-bearers.

“Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” | Genesis 1:26, CSB “Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD.” | Number 14:28, ESV “And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all humanity together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” | Isaiah 40:5, ESV “On that day the LORD will become King over all the earth – the LORD alone and His name alone.” | Zechariah 14:9, ESV “And blessed be His glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen.” | Psalm 72:19, ESV

It was always the purpose of the Eternal to fill this good earth with His glorious presence, as deep and as expansive ‘as the waters cover the sea’. Despite human failure and many, many detours in this story, God has declared that His purpose will not be thwarted. He will accomplish what He intended for His creation, even to [His own personal cost](#), as it turns out.

“I declare the end from the beginning and ancient times from what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish.’” | Isaiah 46:10, ESV

The Kingdom Of God

This glorious and absolute rule and reign of the wise and faithful king is what the New Testament terms the ‘*kingdom of God*’.

The gospel is the good news that in Jesus, who is both saviour and king, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

What many people think of as 'the gospel' – being 'saved' – is actually only just one aspect of a much larger story, *the full gospel* ('good news') story of God's will and purpose for the earth and how humanity is part of that.

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

The kingdom of God is more than social justice or personal salvation. 'The kingdom of God' is the promise of God from the beginning to fill the earth with His glory, essentially, all of Himself, and to rule justly in the hearts and lives of all of humanity. It also 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).

Heaven + Earth

God didn't just create humanity with purpose, He also created the earth with purpose. He cares deeply about what happens to this place we call home and all that He intended it to be.

A critical and essential reality of the kingdom of God includes its physicality. 'The kingdom' is not just an individual, spiritual, Christian *experience* but a literal reality that will be fully expressed and outworked *on the earth*.

Interestingly, intrinsic in the idea of 'kingdom' are the following five things: King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land. You can read more about these different aspects in the articles. '[The People Of The Kingdom](#)' and '[The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet](#)'. However, the particular focus in this article is the reality of 'land' or physicality. This reality, when compared against many different passages in the Bible informs our understanding of what, or more specifically, where, this physical reality is intended to be.

Contrary to what many people may think, *going to heaven is not a Christian's final ending or God's promise*. Resurrection and *life* – heaven's own eternal life – on a regenerated and restored earth, is the hope for every [person of the kingdom](#).

Earth is the place where God's will is to be done (where His kingdom will be fully revealed) in the same way as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), *earth* is the intended inheritance of those who have been faithful, (Psalm 37:11, Matthew 5:5), *earth* is the place where peace and safety will finally reign supreme (Isaiah 2:4, Ezekiel 34:25) and where righteousness will take up residence (2 Peter 3:13), and *earth* is where all creation will finally be set free from its bondage and brought into the glorious freedom that God always intended for it (Romans 8:21).

Earth is the place where the curse of Eden will finally and completely be overthrown and God will return and take up residence amongst His people. Our long exile will be over.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.” Revelation 21:3, BSB

“As N.T Wright and other New Testament scholars have shown, it’s important to understand that kingdom terminology refers not to some faraway paradise filled with disembodied souls, but rather to the will and reign of God, unleashed into the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” (Rachel Held Evans). N T Wright puts it this way: *“Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord’s Prayer is about.”*

The life of heaven – the “life and light of mankind” came to earth in the person of Jesus, shining brightly and giving hope in a damaged and disordered world. In Jesus, we can see the intention of God all along for His creation. In Jesus, all the fullness of God’s glory was displayed in human form and we can see the kind of life God has intended for us.

What God began in the resurrection of Jesus is what He intends to do for all of creation; to regenerate, to restore, and to fully dwell with His creation in all His glory.

The earth, renewed with heaven’s own life, is the epic conclusion to the story, and the final pages close with this promise: *“The angel showed me a river that was crystal clear, and its waters gave life. The river came from the throne where God and the Lamb were seated. Then it flowed down the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the river are trees that grow a different kind of fruit each month of the year.*

The fruit gives life, and the leaves are used as medicine to heal the nations.

God's curse will no longer be on the people of that city. He and the Lamb will be seated there on their thrones, and its people will worship God and will see Him face to face. God's name will be written on the foreheads of the people. Never again will night appear, and no one who lives there will ever need a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule forever. (Revelation 22:1-5, CEV)

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

What happens after the end? Well, the short answer is *we don't know*. We're told so much in the Bible about God's purpose, His original intention for creation, and the lengths to which He has gone to get that story back on track. (Although, side-note, was it really ever truly off-track...?). We're also told how this particular story will conclude.

But what comes after? As it is written, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). The great Christian author, C S Lewis, puts it this way: "All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." (The Last Battle)

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Keeping The Faith

The question isn't "do you truly believe" but, "who do you trust"?

Fidelity In Friendship

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

Without The Applause: Examining Celebrity Culture In The Church

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social Reach

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

church' and connect with their faith community through long periods of isolation and disconnection.

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

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

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

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

In the three decades since the web went public, the way in which we communicate, how information is shared, and how we connect has changed completely. The internet has expanded the

reach of many valuable causes and community endeavours, but it has also increased the level of propaganda and disinformation, as well as challenging our standards of privacy and security.

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

Obscurity, mediocrity, and martyrdom have been replaced by an unnatural emphasis on personas, platforms, and profits. The era of 'Celebrity Christianity' is well and truly upon us.

A Toxic Culture Of Self

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

Celebrity, unlike fame, is another animal altogether. While celebrity can't exist without fame – broad public recognition, it goes beyond mere recognition alone, devolving into intense public interest, attention, and, frequently, adulation. This *cult of personality*, particularly when related to individuals,

often focuses entirely on what is perceived or promoted, not necessarily what is real, with the idolising of an individual creating a level of adoration beyond what is natural or healthy.

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

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

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

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

Yet they are not alone in their blame. To some degree, we are all complicit in allowing this toxic celebrity culture to grow, unchecked, within the Church. We gave them their platform, we encouraged their rise to Christian stardom, and we promoted *their kind of Christianity* as somehow superior and

more praiseworthy. And, by *their kind of Christianity* I mean, with our platform-centric churches and our consumer-driven services, we have not-so-subtly sent the message that anything worth saying must be said from a stage and that the ordinary faithfulness of regular Christians is, well, a little boring and not particularly noteworthy.

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

We have turned people into gods, worshipping the created rather than the Creator, looking to humans to satisfy us, rather than turning to the One in whom we live and move and have our very being.

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

Things We’ve Lost Under The Glare Of The Stage Lights

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

The call to ordinary faithfulness

Fame doesn’t necessarily come at the expense of faithfulness. Jesus, of course, was and still is one of the most famous men on the planet and yet would also be the supreme example of trust and confidence in God. But, by and large, the Christian life is not about notoriety but about quiet humility; taking

up our cross daily, dying to self, and following Jesus wherever he leads.

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

Maybe it's simply holding down two jobs in order to provide for your family and meet your financial responsibilities. Perhaps it's committing to authenticity and honesty in your relationships; business, friendship, community, church, romantic, and parental, choosing to make God at the heart and centre of your interactions. Maybe it's continuing to trust God, even through challenging and difficult circumstances like job loss, ill health, or relationship troubles. Maybe it's volunteering in service in your local church in steady and joyful commitment. Maybe it's doing the right thing, even (or perhaps especially) when no one is looking. At all times it is, as Eugene Peterson puts it, *a long obedience in the same direction*; committed discipleship through worship, service, joy, work, happiness, humility, community, and blessing.

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

The relevance of the local church

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

Yet so many Christians only think of church as something they go to rather than something they identify as. They may

describe themselves as Christian in a general sense, but feel no real connection to or fail to see the relevance of the local church and their participation in it.

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

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

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

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

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

The priesthood of every believer

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

All that changed because of Jesus. Through his reconciling work, the new covenant was instituted, where both Jew and Gentile could become part of God's family, where all people could draw near and find forgiveness and restoration of their relationship with God. The mediating work has been done, once, and for all time by the greatest of all priests, Jesus himself. Because believers become part of Jesus' body, part of the living temple of God, each one of us becomes an ambassador of this great ministry of reconciliation, people of the kingdom, collectively, a 'holy nation', in essence, a *priesthood of every believer* (Exodus 19:6, 1 Peter 2:9)

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

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

The sufficiency of Jesus

What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord

and saviour. For God, who said, ““Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

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

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

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

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

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

A Guide For LGBTQ+ Christian Teens

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

First of all, know this. You are loved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

You are of infinite worth to God.

Know this too, He is not astonished by your mistakes. He's not surprised by your fears or doubts and He isn't shocked by the things you've done wrong. There's nothing you've done that He hasn't already seen coming, that He hasn't accounted for, or

that He hasn't already prepared a way through. Your best moments and your worst moments are all known to him.

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

You are not alone.

You Might Be Wondering...

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part of this plan specifically involved the creation of male and female, [a gender binary](#) that many people today are rejecting. Yet this is exactly how God designed humanity, it is a foundational part of each of our identities, and, collectively, it's how humanity reflects the completeness of God's image. When men and women (male and female) come together in one, extraordinary collective, we are the complete image of all that God Himself is. Isn't that incredible?

LGBTQ+, The Gender Binary + More...

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

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

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

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

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

You will feel *a lot of feels*. And while our feelings are real, and they often provide important signals about what is going on in our world, we need to know that *they're not always reliable*. Feelings *alone* are not adequate markers of what might be true.

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

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

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

If you are a male, remind yourself that you have been gifted with unique and diverse qualities, specific to your sex. This is intentional, incredible, and life-affirming. You're becoming a man, with the opportunity to contribute your incredible characteristics and attributes to the purpose of

God, as He has intended for you. You might feel overwhelmed, and more than a bit nervous but you, too, can trust that God knows what He's doing.

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

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

Let's Talk About Sex

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

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

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

What you need to know is that God has designed sex to be experienced by a man and woman, within the boundaries of a committed, life-long relationship (marriage). This kind of committed sex with a life-long partner provides physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy, and is the foundation for a secure and stable family unit, into which children may be born.

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

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

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

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

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

Getting Back On Track (Why We Need Jesus)

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

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

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

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

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

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

for glory and greatness.

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

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

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

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

An Invitation And A Challenge

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

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

Will you turn away from your willfulness, from governing your

own life without God's guidance, your persistence in trying to find identity in shallow and dissatisfying deceptions, and will you turn to the maker and creator of all things, the One in whose image you're created and with whom you have been intended to experience eternal and satisfying relationship?

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Holy Spirit | This Same Power

*“If the **Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you**, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” | Romans 8:11, ESV*

*“...This is my [Paul’s] prayer. That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of Him: that you may receive that **inner illumination of the Spirit** which will make you realise how great is the hope to which He is calling you—the magnificence and splendour of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how **tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God**. That power is **the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when He raised him from the dead** and gave him the place of supreme honour in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come.” | Ephesians 1:18-21, JB Phillips*

The Spirit has been intricately linked with humanity’s story, from the very beginning. It was God’s Spirit that brought the world into being (Genesis 1:2). It was God’s Spirit that empowered men and women in both the Old and New Testament times to prophesy, decipher dreams, possess extraordinary talent and knowledge, and undertake great feats of courage and action (Genesis 40:8, 41:38, Exodus 31:1-6, Judges 3:10, Judges 6:34, Luke 2:25-26, Luke 2:36-38). It was God’s Spirit that sparked conception in Mary’s womb, bringing about the

birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:30-37). Jesus' veracity as God's Son and the revelation that he was sent 'to take away the sin of the world' were both affirmed by the Spirit (John 1:29-34). And it was the Spirit of God that [raised Jesus from the dead](#) (Mark 16:9, Romans 8:11).

This same Spirit, the Apostle Paul assures us, dwells in all those who have [surrendered to Jesus](#) as their King and Saviour, empowering and transforming their lives too (Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:18-21).

Our story, when we choose to become Christian believers, echos the incredible story of creation and the work of the Holy Spirit in the very beginning. The story of creation is our first glimpse into a story that is retold throughout the Bible; that of bringing life and light out of darkness, through the action of God's Spirit, and often connected with the medium of water.

The Creation Of The World

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." | Genesis 1:1-2, NIV

The heavens and the earth lay empty. We're not told how they came to be this way. We're only given a description of complete nothing-ness – a wasteland of darkness. The Hebrew words used in these verses convey the idea of desolation (*ṭō·hū*), an undistinguishable ruin (*wā·ḇō·hū*). Yet, where we would see hopelessness, God sees possibility. Out of chaos, disorder, and darkness, He brings order, light, and life.

It's into this dark chaos that the Spirit of God breaths. Hovering over the waters like a bird brooding over her young ones, the Spirit of God moves over the face of the deep, poised to begin His creative work.

The Hebrew word for 'spirit' (*wə·rū·aḥ*) can refer to a number of different things. We may tend to think of it as simply breath or wind and sometimes it does mean that. But it's also used to convey more. Energy, vitality, strength, breath (as in, animating power), mind, or even life can all be meant by the word *wə·rū·aḥ*. The Biblical authors also used this word to describe God's personal Presence. Just as wind or breath is invisible, so God's Spirit is invisible; just as wind has power, God's Spirit is powerful; just as we're kept alive by breath, all things are sustained by God's Spirit (Micah 3:8-10, Ecclesiastes 11:5, Acts 2:1-5, Job 34:14-16).

The use of the word *hovering* or *brooding* in Genesis (also translated as '*fluttering lovingly*') gives us a clue as to the more complex nature of God's Spirit. God's Spirit is not just energy, like some kind of electrical current, but is His divine personal Presence, the sum of all His will, His consciousness, His emotion, His character, and His power. His Spirit is of Him and *is* Him. He is everywhere by His Spirit. As the Psalmist poetically exclaims, there is nowhere we can go where God's Spirit is not. This is a concept not easily understood by our human minds.

"Where can I flee from your Spirit? Or where will I run from your presence? If I rise to heaven, there you are! If I lay down with the dead, there you are! If I take wings with the dawn and settle down on the western horizon, your hand will guide me there too, while your right hand keeps a firm grip on me. If I say, "darkness will surely conceal me, and the light around me will become night," even darkness isn't dark to you, darkness and light are the same to you." | Psalm 139: 7-12, ISV

God personally inhabits the creative work that takes place in Genesis. It is His Spirit that empowers life, light, knowledge, beauty, creativity, joy, goodness, fruitfulness, and blessings (Genesis 1:31). It was His Spirit that brought

life and order out of chaos and darkness. Everything seen and unseen is called into being by His Spirit and continues to exist by being connected to His Spirit (Job 34:14-16).

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; their starry host by the breath of His mouth.” | Psalm 33:6, NIV

‘Whereby The World That Then Was Being Overflowed With Water Perished’

This good world that God breathed into life did not remain that way for long. Genesis 6 paints a grim picture of a world that had fallen once more into chaos, disarray, and spiritual darkness.

Some 1600 years after creation, the world had become so evil that God regretted He had ever made humans (Genesis 6:6). In fact, it broke His heart. His Spirit, everything that is good and right, was sustaining a creation that was ‘rotten to the core’ (Genesis 6:5) and which was actively striving against God’s Spirit (Genesis 6:3). The Hebrew meaning behind Genesis 6:5 is that it was not only the imagination of humans that had been corrupted but their purposes and desires too. They had brought darkness and ruin into the world to the point where God’s Spirit, which sustained all things, including humanity, would no longer choose to sustain such evil.

Genesis 6-8 provides the narrative of the catastrophe that came upon humanity. The ‘world that then was’ was completely erased by water and all in whom the ‘spirit of life’ resided perished (Genesis 7:22).

“And every living thing on the face of the earth was destroyed – man and livestock, crawling creatures and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth, and only Noah remained, and those with him in the ark.” | Genesis 7:23, BSB

*“...that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.”
| 2 Peter 3:5-6, AKJV*

Only Noah, who had ‘[walked with God](#)’ and his family were saved (Genesis 9:6). The phrase ‘walked with God’ recalls, perhaps, the original unity of the relationship between humanity and God, where God had ‘walked in the cool of Eden’s garden’ alongside humans (Genesis 3:8). This unity was disrupted when Adam and Eve, grasping at equality with God, acted in opposition to God’s will, resulting in them being banished from the garden and God’s Presence. ‘Walking with God’ is often used throughout the Bible as an expression of returning to a unified relationship with God. It’s what we were created for and what God has always intended for all of humanity.

“For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.” | Ephesians 2:10, NIV

Born Again Of Water And Spirit

It is over this vast emptiness of water that we once again see a bird hovering, signaling God’s Presence (Genesis 8:8-17). ‘The world that then was’ had been born again of water and spirit, washed clean and ready for hope and the regeneration of life.

*“Then he [Noah] sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was **a freshly plucked olive***

leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.” | Genesis 8: 8-12, NIV

Centuries pass. The Spirit of God moves powerfully through the ebb and flow of the history of humanity. His intention for His creation will not be thwarted and He will walk with humanity again in a whole and restored relationship. The way He will accomplish this is, of course, through His Son, Jesus.

Jesus | The New Creation

God steps personally into our drama by sending His Son. The Word, the expression of God, the sum of all His will, His consciousness, His emotion, His character, and His power was poured out and made human (John 1:14).

John, the author of the fourth gospel account in the New Testament, deliberately parallels the Genesis account when beginning his record of this pivotal moment in human history; [the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God](#). He tells us that ‘*in the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was **with** God, and the Word **was** God*’ (John 1:1). The use of the word *logos* here is deeply connected to who God is, to the very nature and essence of God, containing within itself the ability to intelligently and lovingly create and sustain life.

Interestingly, perhaps because of the lofty and soaring theology contained in his writings, the apostle John is often symbolised by an eagle, reminding us once again of a bird, brooding over dark waters, poised and waiting to create.

That ‘Word’, and all that is contained by the expression, became a human and ‘dwelt among us’. He was ‘*God-With-Us*’ – and anyone who saw him saw all the radiance of God’s glory; the exact representation of His being (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11). In him, was life and the light of men (John 1:4).

He is the Light that shines in the darkest places of the human heart, bringing peace to the chaos and order and beauty again. That human, of course, was Jesus.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” | 2 Corinthians 4:6, KJV

Jesus was human like us. And yet, there was something different about him too. [He was a man, but not merely a man.](#) In him, ‘the entire fullness (completeness) of God dwelt in bodily form’ (Colossians 2:9). [Jesus was a new kind of creation,](#) a new kind of human and he came to show us how we can be a new kind of human too.

“The first man was named Adam, and the Scriptures tell us that he was a living person. But Jesus, who may be called the last Adam, is a life-giving Spirit.” | 1 Corinthians 15:45, NIV

Jesus came preaching the good news of salvation, of reconciliation with God, of being able to walk with God in complete harmony again. Jesus enters the tablet of human history like a blazing fire, burning away all that is false and bringing to light that which is true (Malachi 3:2-3).

There is a new reality, he affirms, one where God rules completely in the hearts of humanity and this reality, he proclaims, is right now! The kingdom of God had arrived and this new kind of living would ignite like fire in people’s hearts (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:15)

It is early in his ministry that Jesus demonstrates how this new kind of living begins. He comes to Jordan, where John the Baptist was preaching the baptism of repentance. John’s baptism was first intended to bring people to an

acknowledgment and repentance of sin.

But John also tells the crowds that a little water would mean nothing if they weren't prepared to change their lives. Baptism needed to ignite the kingdom life within a believer, renewing men and women from the inside out. They needed to be 'born again', of [water and of spirit](#).

Jesus showed exactly what this looked like. Although He didn't need baptism for the forgiveness of sin – he never committed any, he still participated in the baptism of repentance, to 'fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). He demonstrated clearly what would be required of all humanity (the act of [belief and baptism](#)) to be able to participate in this new kingdom life.

Upon rising from the water, the Spirit of God came to rest upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven proclaiming '*this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*' (Matthew 3:16). This was a public demonstration of not just the validity of Jesus as God's son but also how all believers who participate in this new creative work would experience rebirth by God's Spirit.

Not long after his baptism, Jesus confirms the significance and importance of being 'born again of water and spirit'. He speaks with Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and leader of the Jews. Nicodemus believed Jesus to truly be a teacher who had come from God and Jesus takes the opportunity to reaffirm that being reborn of water and spirit is an essential part of becoming a new creation, and 'entering the kingdom of God' (John 3:5).

The baptism of Jesus is another beautiful echo of the story first told to us in Genesis, where God's Spirit hovered like a bird over the waters, before beginning His incredible creative work. It also recalls the story of the washing and regeneration of the world in Noah's day and the new life that

was signaled by the flight of a dove above the waters.

New Life By The Spirit

The truth is, what really needs washing clean is the human heart. The innermost part of humanity, where God wants to be completely at one with us, was separated from God by Adam and Eve's choices. The human heart lies in darkness and chaos and only God's Spirit can bring life and light to this disordered place (Jeremiah 17:9, Mark 7:21-22).

As it was *in the beginning*, the chaos and darkness that is in our lives can be washed clean and reordered. Regeneration, to be born anew, is the termination of people of the old creation with all their deeds and the germination of them in the new creation with the divine life. We take all of the darkness, failure, chaos, and ruin of our life and surrender it to God, who erases it in the water of baptism (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6).

Light enters the darkness. That light is Jesus and he brings the knowledge of God into our hearts.

"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." | 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, ESV

New life is ignited in us and the new human is reborn. Yet this new life does not come without the promise of help (Ephesians 1:13-14). Jesus tells his disciples that God will send them a comforter to teach and guide them in this new kingdom life. They will be empowered and sustained by nothing less than the Spirit of God – the Holy Spirit; the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and **He will give you another Helper to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.** The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” | John 14:15-16, 26, ESV*

*“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, **and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** This promise belongs to you and your children and to all who are far off – to all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself. With many other words he testified, and he urged them, “Be saved from this corrupt generation.” Those who embraced his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to the believers that day” | Acts 2:38-41, BSB*

*“He redeemed us in order that the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive **the promise of the Spirit.**” | Galatians 3:14, BSB*

When Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the good news to the world, making disciples of all nations, he gave them the following instruction:

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in **the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” | Matthew 28:19-20, NIV*

Holy Spirit | This Same Power

The mechanism by which we are renewed, as Christians, is no different from that in the past. It is God's Spirit, which has been *with* God and *is* God since the beginning, and by which everything seen and unseen was created.

Having surrendered our own self-will, we are instructed to ask, as little children would from a parent, for the gift of God's Spirit to come and 'make His home with us' (Luke 11:13, John 14:23). In our new kingdom life, we are directed by God's Spirit in the face of evil and doubt and are strengthened by the teachings of His written Word, the Bible (John 14:16-17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

We are filled with faith and hope, because of the love of God which has been shed in our hearts by His Spirit (Romans 5:5). We rejoice in the Lord, and in the strength of His might, acknowledging that even in this renewing and regeneration, the work is not ours but His (Philippians 2:13, Ephesians 2:10, 2 Corinthians 4:6-7). We are comforted, despite our Saviour's absence (John 14:18-25), walking in the path of light by God's Spirit (Romans 8:14, 1 John 1:7).

Our bodies become temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), where His Spirit is pleased to dwell (Romans 8:9) and we wait, with patience in this life, for the final redemption of our mortal bodies by that same Spirit at Jesus' return (Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:53, Romans 2:7, 2 Corinthians 5:4).

"None of us has anything which he did not receive. To begin with, God gives to all life and breath, and in Him we live and move and have our being. Then, fallen creatures as we now are, God gives the blessing of His Son to open out the way of life; and He gives His Word to tell of His purpose which culminates in that Son. To follow that, He promises all needful help from above to answer the needs of His servants and strengthen them

on the way of pilgrimage to the Kingdom of His glory. The apostle [Paul] bids disciples offer their bodies a living sacrifice to God that, by His power and blessing, they may be both strengthened to do them and as the essential road to their own salvation, that they may be “transformed by the renewing of their mind, that they may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”, who through Christ their Lord, “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” | Alfred Norris, The Holy Spirit and the Believer Today

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