

# Before + After

## Truth #1: 'before'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

characterised by sin, evil, and separation from God.

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

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

This is our 'before'.

## **Truth #2: 'After'**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **An Argument For The Trinity**

If you're an orthodox Christian, already familiar with the doctrine of the Trinity, you might like to head somewhere else right now. This article will probably be, as they say, preaching to the converted.

But if that's not you, and the idea of the Trinity is new, challenging, confronting, downright heretical, or, as far as you're concerned, completely unbiblical...just hear me out.

I grew up being told all these things about the Trinity. I can confidently say now that not only do I believe I was misinformed about what the doctrine endeavours to articulate, I was also misinformed about the historical background and context of this doctrine, what the early church taught regarding the nature of Jesus, and what scripture itself teaches.

Several things resulted in a massive shift in my perspective, understanding, and belief of this doctrine, which I'd like to share in this article and which I hope will be helpful to anyone wrestling with this topic. It's not necessarily everyone's conversation of choice, but it's come up several times with different individuals in the past few months, and so now seemed like the right time to share some thoughts on this one.

# The Context Of The Council Of Nicea

In the spring of 325AD, a council of Christian bishops convened in the city of Nicaea (now known as the town of İznik, in modern-day Turkey). They met to deliberate over a theological dispute that had arisen concerning the nature of Jesus, his origins, and his relationship to God the Father.

Known as the Arian controversy – named for the presbyter and priest (Arius) to whom the controversy is attributed – the gathering was not so much an argument about whether Jesus was *God*, but rather, a dispute over whether Jesus was *eternal*; and therefore *without beginning*, or whether he had been created *before time* and was therefore subordinate to the Father.

This is an important distinction: the Council was not arguing over whether ‘*Jesus was God*’ (God the Son), as I had always been taught. This was a dispute over whether he had always existed (and was therefore of *the same substance* as the Father) or whether he had been begotten/created (and was therefore *similar but not the same* as God the Father).

*“Arian theology holds that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who was begotten by God the Father with the difference that the Son of God did not always exist but was begotten/made before time by God the Father; therefore, Jesus was not coeternal with God the Father, but nonetheless Jesus began to exist outside time.”*

This was an ontological argument. Who was Jesus before he was Jesus, did he *always exist* before time or was he *created* before time? Was the Son *equal* with the Father or *subordinate*? Was he *the same as* or *different* from the Father?

## What Did The Early Church Teach?

The reason the Arian theology was so controversial is because it was *a change to the status quo*. The early church taught and

believed in the divinity of the Son, and that his nature was the same essence and substance as God the Father. They believed that Jesus, as the Word of God, was eternal, was from God Himself, and therefore was of the same substance as God.

*“According to its [Arianism’s] opponents, especially the bishop [St. Athanasius](#), Arius’ teaching reduced the Son to a demigod, reintroduced polytheism (since worship of the Son was not abandoned), and undermined the Christian concept of redemption, since only he who was truly God could be deemed to have reconciled humanity to the Godhead.” | [Britannica](#)*

We have not just the writings of well-known apostles like Paul and Peter and John, but also those who came after them – extra-biblical sources – who taught about Christ as the Word of God, the virgin birth, and the incarnation. Names such as Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Polycarp, and Irenaeus, many of whom were contemporaries and disciples of the apostles, wrote and taught extensively on this subject. You can read, for example, Ignatius’ letter to the Ephesians (written some time between 107–110 CE) [here](#).

It is an egregious misrepresentation to say that the divinity of Christ was invented in the fourth century; what is actually true is that the accepted understanding of *the nature of Christ* was being challenged. The intention of the Council of Nicene was, therefore, to define, in written form, what the church *already believed and taught regarding Jesus*, binding Christendom together in unity across different traditions and practices.

The Nicene Creed used the same three-fold structure as the more simple and earlier creeds, such as the Apostles’ Creed, which had touched very little on this topic, and, because of this particular controversy, went into more depth and detail in relation to Christology – that is, the nature and origin of Jesus Christ.

## Is 'Trinity' In The Bible?

The early church fathers taught and believed in the divinity of Jesus, his existence before time, and his incarnation as the Word-Made-Flesh. But perhaps they had deviated significantly in doctrine in the first few years of the church's existence?

This is often one of the criticisms leveled at the Trinity from those who reject it, a two-fold dismissal if you like; firstly, that the word 'trinity' isn't mentioned in the Bible and, secondly, that its 'official introduction' in the fourth century (a claim shown to be a misrepresentation, at best) was 'the great apostasy' the church had been warned about (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

It's suggested that as early as AD98, only a generation on from the incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), the church had veered wildly off-course and into heresy, even with the Holy Spirit as guide and teacher, the very recent reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the powerful witness of those who had walked with him, many of whom were still alive.

Honestly? I find that extremely unlikely.

I trust not only the teaching of the apostles themselves, who were radically transformed by their experience of the resurrection, but also the work of the Holy Spirit, active and powerful, in growing the church and supporting the new believers in their faith. It just doesn't seem credible to me that something so important, so vital, so life-changing could be corrupted and derailed so early on.

Certainly, the church began to face challenges as time went on, particularly as the apostolic age drew to a close. It experienced great periods of persecution, followed finally by a shift in fortune in the form of open favour from Rome's



pagan Emperor, Constantine, the emperor of the Nicene Creed. Yet it was during the early years of persecution and struggle that we find the orthodox doctrines being taught and written about, not formulated later under, as is sometimes asserted, pagan influences.

You can research any of the early church fathers and their teaching for yourself. Ignatius, for example, an early Christian writer and later Patriarch of Antioch, wrote many letters which serve as examples of early Christian theology. He, along with Polycarp, another apostolic father, are traditionally held to be disciples of John of the Revelation, and demonstrated their 'trinitarian' consciousness in their writings.

Just as the word 'omnipotence' isn't found in the Bible, and yet we understand the concept of God's supremacy and power to be taught throughout scripture, so, too, you won't find the word 'trinity', and yet the concept of One God, revealed to us in three distinct persons, completely unified with each other, can be found throughout the New Testament.

Here are several biblical passages which teach this concept regarding the Christology of Jesus. Take some time to read through them for yourself: John 1:1-5, John 1:1-5, John 5:17-18; John 10:33-38, Hebrews 1:1-4, Colossians 1:18-20, Colossians 2:9, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:6-11, John 17:5, 2 Corinthians 8:9, John 8:58.

While the word 'trinity' is not explicitly used in the New Testament letters and epistles, the *concept* of the trinity was certainly expressed by biblical authors and was the understanding of the early church, as can be seen by the extensive writings of the early church fathers. It was this understanding that the Nicene Creed attempted to articulate and document in 325AD.

# God Is 'One' So The Trinity – 'Three Gods' – Can't Be Right. Can It?

One of the huge misconceptions that non-Trinitarians hold to is the belief that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches there are three gods. In reality, the Trinitarian doctrine actually affirms biblical monotheism and rejects the heresy of 'three gods' (polytheism).

The Bible teaches that God is One, but not in the numerical sense that is often used by non-Trinitarians. God is One in the sense that there is no other. He, alone, is the singular God in all the universe.

The ancient Jewish prayer – known as the Shema – recites this truth *"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And as for you, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"*.

The meaning of this famous prayer is that the people of Israel were to learn to listen and love God fully, above all else, with all their hearts. The Shema wasn't making a statement about God's essence but rather His preeminence. It wasn't intended to function as a negation of the idea of the Trinity but as a statement of allegiance to the only true God, particularly relevant for a people who had been steeped in polytheism for generations.

*"This prayer has been one of the most influential traditions in Jewish history, functioning both as the Jewish pledge of allegiance and a hymn of praise."* | The Bible Project

Interestingly, Jesus quotes the Shema on two occasions in the synoptic gospels, in Matthews 22 and Mark 12. In Matthew, he follows up immediately with questions about the origins and paternity of the Messiah, the Messiah's relationship to the great king of Israel, David, and the title given to the Messiah of 'Lord'; an interesting progression of thought from

Jesus, and one which had the effect of reducing his audience to silence.

## **Isn't The Trinity Doctrine 'Catholic'?**

If, by 'catholic', you mean 'universal', then yes. For the first fifteen hundred years of the church's history, there was only one, 'universal' church and early creeds will often refer to the church in this way. The church's official position in relation to the nature of Christ had been documented in the Nicene Creed in 325AD and it remains the official, orthodox, (accepted) doctrinal position.

However, I suspect what is actually being asked is, "*isn't the Trinity doctrine part of the Roman Catholic Church?*" (ie 'a Catholic thing') and the short answer is no. The Trinity isn't only specific to the Roman Catholic Church. All three branches of Christianity (Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism) subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Even after the Protestant Reformation swept through Europe, beginning with the nailing of Martin Luther's 95 Theses to the castle church in Wittenberg, the resultant split between the Catholic Church and its Protestant offspring largely revolved around the idea that people should be independent in their relationship with God, taking personal responsibility for their faith and referring directly to the Bible for guidance, instead of priests or popes. The Reformation rejected the doctrine of papal supremacy, among other things, and arrived at different views on ecclesiastical polity, apostolic succession, and the nature of salvation, however disagreement on the Trinity was not one of the areas of argument.

That being said, there are a few exceptions; some further religious movements arose out of the Protestant movement which rejected the doctrine of the Trinity; these branches of Christianity are known as 'Unitarian' but are [Socinian](#) rather than Arian in theology.

# What Does It Mean To Be God?

The Bible gives us many descriptions of Who and What 'God' is, endeavouring to help us understand the concept of God, as best we can, from our limited human experience.

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator of all things, the source of all life, sovereign over all, powerful, and perfect. Without beginning and without end, He is eternal, holy, clothed in light, glorious as the sun. Yet He is also tender, loving, forgiving, as compassionate as any mother to her children, and as protective as any father defending His family.

We are created in His image, bearing many of His attributes, yet because of the fall, bound by mortality and constrained by sin. The fall in Eden resulted in brokenness in our relationship with God, creating an impenetrable barrier that we couldn't cross (Exodus 33:18-23). As the popular worship song, 'Jesus, My Living Hope' laments, *"How great the chasm that lay between us, how high the mountain I could not climb."*

Until Jesus came, no one had ever seen God face to face. Yet as Timothy writes (1 Timothy 3:16), the invisible God was made visible in Jesus, *"this is, without question, the great mystery of our faith; God was revealed in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."*

If we could not come to God (and we couldn't – see below: 'God Does The Saving'), then God would come to us.

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

John, writer of the fourth gospel, offers a more insightful

perspective, opening with the otherworldly prologue regarding Jesus and his origins; specifically, the identification of Jesus as the Word, who was with God and was God in the beginning.

Through Jesus, he says, all things have been brought into being; he is the light and life of humanity, who became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory – face-to-face at last – as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

God came to us, wrapped in the perishable, temporary covering [of flesh and bone](#), the full intensity and glory hidden within Jesus. We have a hint of what that glory was like in Luke 9:29-32, where the veil was lifted momentarily and his appearance was altered, an event the Bible calls ‘the transfiguration’.

Jesus himself declared that only he could reveal God fully, in his words, “no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27b) and that “the person who has seen him [Jesus] has seen the Father.” (John 14:8-9).

The gospel of John offers more: seven ‘signs’ culminating in the resurrection of Lazarus (proof of Jesus’ power over even death itself), and seven ‘I am’ discourses, culminating in the declaration by Thomas concerning Jesus as “my Lord and my God”. The first instance, in John 8:58, leaves no doubt that Jesus’ claimed to be God incarnate, because the Jews were infuriated by his reply and took up stones to kill him.

*“John’s “high Christology” depicts Jesus as divine and preexistent, defends him against Jewish claims that he was “making himself equal to God”, and talks openly about his divine role and echoing Yahweh’s “I Am that I Am” with seven “I Am” declarations of his own.” | Stephen L Harris, Understanding the Bible*

Jesus was fully God; the invisible God made visible in a way that we could draw near to, touch, walk with, and eat with. Yet Jesus didn't count his equality with God as something to be held onto, but rather something to be set down, for our sakes, and did so 'by becoming a man like other men' (Philippians 2:7-9, Weymouth NT).

## **Nothing Is Impossible With God**

Those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity often do so on the basis that it's impossible; how could God become human or how could God die? And who was 'left in heaven' if God came to earth? (yet another misunderstanding about who was sent and who was the sender: "And we have seen and testify that *the Father* has sent *His Son* to be the Savior of the world.")

Yet we also accept many other impossibilities in scripture: that life can be created from nothing, that sickness can be completely healed, that water and wind can be controlled, that time can be stopped, that water can be turned into wine, that bread and fish can be multiplied, that death itself can be overcome and vanquished.

Nothing, literally, nothing is impossible with God and if we learn anything from scripture, it's that we should be ready to entertain any possibility and expect any outcome. Though we might not always understand how something could be possible, that shouldn't stop us from believing that it could. Our cry should always be, 'Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief.'

God is Spirit. He is not limited by shape, force, boundaries or time. The same, however, cannot be said of humanity. We *are* limited; by time, by physicality, by mortality, by sin. There are things we simply cannot do.

What shifted in my perspective in this particular area was the realisation that without the doctrine of the Trinity, the concept of redemption becomes humanly impossible.

While Jesus had to be truly human – atonement was required on behalf of humanity and only a human could make this restitution (and I've [written about Jesus' humanity elsewhere](#)) – if he had been *only human*, it would have been impossible for him to have overcome sin.

Limited in the same way that we are, even with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, he couldn't have lived a perfect, sinless life and, therefore, successfully 'made atonement' for sin, or have overthrown the greatest enemy, death itself.

This was the entire point of the giving of the Old Covenant; it was intended that humanity should realise through their failure to keep the Law, despite even the best of intentions, their complete inability to atone for or redeem themselves and restore their relationship with God.

Humanity was in an awful bind, a catch-22 situation of epic proportions: atonement must be made by a human...but no human perfect enough or powerful enough existed to make such an atonement. That is the very definition of humanly impossible.

*"But behold"*, God says, *"I will make a way in the desert. I am about to do something new. Prepare the way of the Lord..."* While impossible with humanity, nothing was impossible with God.

The Word Who was in the beginning, Who called life into being, Who is the source of life and light of humanity stepped in the very creation He had made in order to save and redeem it. The Word – truly God – became human, He became the representative of us all and in his human body, the war against sin and death would be waged and won.

What was impossible for us became possible with God. Jesus Christ – truly human and truly God; the One and Only Begotten Son of the Father had come to save the world and reconcile us back to God.

# God Does The Saving

It seems to me that once you start paying attention, you realise the Bible is telling the same story over and over again, but just in different ways, and it can perhaps be summarised in one simple sentence: "God Does The Saving."

*"Praise the Lord, who carries our burdens day after day; he is the God who saves us. Our God is a God who saves; he is the Lord, our Lord, who rescues us from death." | Psalm 68:19-20*

At every turn, humanity's inability to overthrow the curse of Eden is demonstrated, as chapter after chapter of the Bible lays out the moral bankruptcy of the human race. Humans were unable to wage war against sin and win, or to overthrow death. The separation that had resulted from the fall in Eden couldn't be healed just by human power, it needed divine intervention.

It would be God, and it was always going to be God, who would do the saving.

I think this raises another significant point, and one which is worth spending some time on: the difference between a grace-framed salvation theology and a works-framed salvation theology.

Grace tells us that God saves because of Who He is, not because of who we are. We are *saved by grace through faith* – and this is not of ourselves – it is a gift of God. Human endeavour played no part in the work of saving or redeeming humanity back to God. (Ephesians 2:4-10). And this 'work of saving' took place long before we ever turned to God, even, as Romans comments, "*while we were still sinners.*"

Jesus showed us the kind of human we were intended to be, and the kind of holy life we were purposed for, an exact



representation of the divine. He didn't achieve this through grit, sheer willpower, or determined asceticism, but because he *was also truly God*. Nothing of his life should convince us that we can ever be like him, *by our own resolve, strength, or determination* or that by doing good we are *contributing to our salvation*.

Even the most steadfast, committed, faithful Christian does not add anything to the victory won by Jesus and it is only the work of *Christ-in-us* that we are able to become more like God (our works, however, *do* prove our faith is real – and I've written [more about that here](#)).

Irenaeus, an early church father, puts it like this: "*For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.*"

I think the problem with making Jesus human *and only human* is that we are making the work of salvation a human endeavour. We are in danger of seeing Jesus' life as a model for good behaviour (that will somehow make us right with God), and we are framing our Christian life as an exercise of our own determination and willpower which will enable us to overcome. Unspoken but implicit in this theology is the idea that "if you try hard enough, *you too* can overcome like Jesus".

But it is only in *Christ* that we are more than conquerors; we are graciously invited into his victory, and it is only because, in Christ, *who was divine*, God raising us up to partake in the divine nature (*theosis*) becomes possible.

## **In Conclusion (And Not To Be Considered Exhaustive!)**

If you've been wrestling with this topic, the best place to start is always, of course, with scripture. And the best way to start is by asking questions.

I would suggest you take some time to read through the New Testament letters and gospels and notice what the writers are telling you about Jesus. If the idea of 'the Trinity' is new or challenging for you, simply set that aside for now; you're not seeking to prove or disprove the doctrine, only to hear what scripture has to say. Begin the exercise with a willing mind, an open heart, and a prayer for God to reveal Himself.

Read about church history, particularly the first 300 years, for yourself, and seek out the writings of the early church fathers (pre-Nicene era). Is the language used or are the concepts described by them compatible with scripture? Or do they introduce ideas thoroughly at odds with the Bible?

Familiarise yourself with the background and context of the Council of Nicea. What was the reason they gathered? Does this reshape your understanding of the creed and provide better explanation to the language used within it? Are the conclusions of the Council (irrespective of their 'wordiness') consistent with your journey through scripture and history?

Consider the reason for Jesus' coming: why was he sent and what did he accomplish? Jesus himself told us when only just a young boy that "he must be about His Father's business" (Luke 2:49). What was "this business"? Of particular relevance to these questions is Jesus' discourse in John 8:12-58.

Don't try to arrive at a resolution or conclusion in a single moment and allow yourself the freedom to acknowledge that there are things you may not know or understand now, or ever. Our hope rests not in our complete comprehension but in our posture of trust in the One who saves.

And finally, I would respectfully encourage you to consider this: our theology – what we think about God – is important. How can we begin to know and understand ourselves and our place in this expansive creation if we have no sense of the One who made us and the purpose for which we've been made?

However, a robust and living theology will spring from understanding and experiencing who God is and what He has done for us, in Jesus, not simply by giving agreement to a statement or creed of 'theological beliefs'.

To know God is to know Jesus, whom He sent ([John 17:3](#)), and, therefore, the true starting point of our theology as Christians is looking to Jesus and, fundamentally, to God, in Jesus, crucified. It is in this that we see the extent to which God was prepared to go in order to rescue and redeem us.

Although deeply theological in its language, I believe the Trinity doctrine boldly endeavours to affirm and clarify this reality, underscoring the deep commitment of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to rescuing, redeeming and restoring creation.

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## **In Him Was Life**

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

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## **Lessons From The Seven Churches**

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

a living, breathing contradiction.

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## Living Intentionally

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

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## 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·bō·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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**This article was first published 28 October 2019**

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# Regeneration + The Holy Spirit

*“Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” | 2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV*

There can be a tendency to reduce the work of the gospel to simply to a culture of ‘making us nice’. That is to say, that being a Christian equates to a program of basic self-improvement. Yet there are plenty of nice people who aren’t Christians; people who do good things for others without having Jesus in their life. And while Jesus does, of course, make a difference in the lives of believers, it’s more than just ‘making us nice’.

## New Not Nice

Jesus didn’t come to *improve us* – he came to *save us!*

We were made to [walk with God](#) and dwell in His presence. God, who is the source of all life, made humans in His image and in His likeness, with the potential and capability to be like Him, to reflect His glory throughout the earth.

But the effects of sin entering the world were dramatic and far-reaching. Humanity died that day – not physically or immediately, but spiritually. Our union with God was severed and we became separated from God’s presence. And just as we have inherited physical life from our parents, we also inherit spiritual death. Every human who is born comes into the world physically alive but spiritually dead. Without our spiritual connection with God, we are nothing more than ‘dead men walking’, living in darkness and far from the eternal life God intended for us.

And no amount of ‘nice’ can fix this.



*“With the Lord’s authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; 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 pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. But that isn’t what you learned about Christ. Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.” | Ephesians 4:17-24, ESV*

The Christian life doesn’t start with reformation. You cannot reform a dead heart. The Christian life starts with a radical regeneration. From spiritual death comes a resurrected life, a new nature, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

A truly gospel-shaped life is one that begins in death. [Baptism](#), the Bible tells us, is a symbol of the death that Jesus experienced. And by his death, he destroyed the power of sin and death; those things which keep us separated from God and the life He has purposed for us. Through Jesus, it becomes possible for us to be reconciled again to God’s good life and His life-giving spirituality. We’re told, if we die with Jesus (in baptism), we will also live with him, participants in his resurrection life. That life starts right now, the very moment a believer rises from the waters of baptism.

*“That’s what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we’re going in our new grace-sovereign country. Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with*

*Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word.”*  
| Romans 6:3-10, MSG

If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his [life-giving resurrection](#)! Not just as some future hope or aspirational thought but as a reality, right now! Our dead spirituality is reborn, renewed, and regenerated in Jesus. It's into the darkness of spiritual death that God has shone His glorious light of life, the knowledge of the glory of Himself expressed in Jesus.

This is why Paul can so confidently say in his letters to the churches at Colosse and Corinth:

*“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory...”* | Colossians 3:4, ESV

*“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

## **Saved Not Sincere**

When we accept [the truth of our situation](#) and choose to do something about it, the Bible doesn't tell us to 'believe and be sincere'. The Bible tells us to believe and [be saved](#). That's not to say that sincerity isn't important. Of course it is. But the emphasis – the first word about the action that takes place – is about the activity of God. It's God who is

saving us and it's God who is renewing us. It's God who accepts our belief in the sacrifice of Jesus and sends [His Spirit](#) into our lives to regenerate us as new creatures in His Son.

**God** graciously gives salvation to those who repent and believe. It is **His** action in our lives that makes the difference. **He** transfers us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of His son, **He** adopts us as His children and **the Spirit** himself bears witness to this new identity.

The work of saving is entirely God's and this is why we can confidently preach 'that we are saved by grace through faith alone and not by our works'. [Grace is what saves, faith is the instrument through which it is effected.](#)

This is vitally important because when we believe our faith is what saves us\*, we begin to measure our faith (and others') by the intensity of it (or the lack thereof). We begin to think of faith as a single act, rather than a life of orientation.

*"Faith isn't an emotion God evaluates by its intensity. Faith is trust and it's only as good as the object of its trust. So the question isn't, "do you truly believe?" but "who do you believe in?" We must point continually to God in Christ, who is good and generous and amazingly gracious. We trust Him and His grace for our salvation, not the strength of our emotions." | Michael Lawrence*

Faith trusts that this work isn't ours – it's God's and He's doing it for His glory. [He saves not because of who we are but because of who He is.](#) Why? Because He loves us.

*"Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with every good thing to do His will. And may He accomplish in us what is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory*

*forever and ever. Amen.” | Hebrews 13:20-21, NIV*

*“For it is God who works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good pleasure.” | Phillipians 2:13, NIV*

*“And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore you, secure you, strengthen you, and establish you. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.” | 1 Peter 5:10 BSB*

## **Disciples Not Decisions**

Our resurrected life is not dominated by decisions that come and go but by faithfully following Jesus. Every Christian's life starts at a certain point, with a decision, but that one decision alone is not enough to make us a disciple. Resurrection life continues as a life marked by discipleship. Every day, the mission is the same: a commitment to follow Jesus, regardless of the cost.

Having faith does not mean *'being spiritual'* or *'belonging to a faith community'* or *'seeking spiritual direction'*. Of course, it may involve those things but having faith is wholehearted trust that God will keep His promises, and this trust is constantly affirmed and demonstrated by a transformed life.

It's examining ourselves, not just on Sunday, but every day, to see if we are *'in the faith'*.

It's waiting on Jesus.

We must be committed to not just making *'a faithful decision'* on any given day, but to being disciples – life-long followers of Jesus who take up their cross, enduring hardship, because our trust is in Jesus' sacrifice and God's promise to us in

this.

But we are not alone in our resurrected life.

*“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*

God’s own Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are His children. Our existence is now framed by Christ’s life – who is, himself, a life-giving Spirit.

*“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*

This resurrected life comes with the promise of help (Ephesians 1:13-14) from the Spirit of God Himself. Jesus tells his disciples that God will send them a *comforter, counsellor, advocate or helper* (παράκλητος (paráklētos) to

teach and guide them. The spark of new life that has been lit in their hearts will grow and be 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*

## **Led By The Spirit**

Christianity is a relationship, not a [ritual](#) or a religious code of ethics. It's living in [communion](#) with the Father and His Son and being constantly led by the Holy Spirit in our discipleship. It's living in freedom from the power that sin

and death formerly had over us.

This freedom is one of the most precious realities of our regenerated life.

In no way does this deny the continuous struggle believers still have with sin, but we can have trust and confidence that we have been transferred out of sin's dominion and into the kingdom of Jesus; that we are a child of God and that, day by day, we are being renewed and transformed into the likeness of His Son.

Not only this, the blood of Jesus is able to cleanse us from all sin. If we confess, He is faithful and just to forgive.

*“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” | Colossians 1:13, NIV*

*“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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 8:9-11, NIV*

*“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?” | 1 Corinthians 3:16 – NIV*

We are empowered to live a fully reconciled '[kingdom life](#)', both with God and to each other, brought together as [family and community](#) through the precious blood of our saviour. Together, believers become the church of Christ – his body;

fellow citizens with the family and household of God, and a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Our greatest hope and expectation is that Christ, who is our life, will one day appear and change our corruptible bodies to incorruptible bodies and we will be forever with our Lord ([Romans 8:11](#), [1 Corinthians 15:53](#), [Romans 2:7](#), [2 Corinthians 5:4](#)).

God always intended to dwell with His people and, through Jesus, this became possible. The Holy Spirit works powerfully in us to change our hearts. Christians are now connected, in a deeply spiritual way, to the source of eternal life for which we were always purposed. Our faith, hope, and love grow more each day in similarity to the One who empowers our life and we begin to look more and more like Him.

The power and truth of the gospel are displayed when people begin to live differently, empowered by God's Spirit. We become a community that can only be explained by a gospel that truly converts and changes lives.

For those of us who may have been out of step with the Spirit, now is the time to open our hearts and our lives to the transforming and regenerating work of the Spirit. Ask, as a child would from a parent, for the gift of the Spirit to come and create in you a new heart.

Now is the season to discover how to walk alongside the Spirit, not expecting God to do all the work, nor trying to do it all ourselves. Being led by the Spirit is following Jesus in faithful discipleship, in partnership with God in His great kingdom mission, fully empowered by His Eternal Spirit.

*"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" | Luke 11:13, NIV*

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you*



*trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” | Romans 15:13, NIV*

*“And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” | Romans 5:5 – NIV*

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**\*If faith doesn’t save, then why does James make such a big deal about faith and works? When he wrote his letter, James was actually concerned with counterfeit Christianity of another kind – the unauthenticity of a life that is ‘Christian’ in name only. James is talking about those who make a ‘one-time decision’ to ‘be a Christian’ and yet nothing really changes in their lives. He is tackling a different, yet no less dangerous distortion of the gospel of grace, the idea that believers can ‘continue in sin that grace may abound’. That is to say, that nothing about the way the believer behaves or lives after being [saved](#) needs to change, that verbally expressing our faith in Jesus is enough, and that we don’t need to ‘do better’ because God’s grace covers all our shortcomings anyway. James is talking about a half-gospel, one that possibly makes us ‘feel better about ourselves’ but doesn’t convert our hearts or demonstrate true [discipleship](#) by a transformed life.**

**The truth, James says, is that *yes, we are made right with God by believing and professing our faith in His promises. Yet, it cannot be real faith, the faith that counts with God, unless it’s demonstrated by an active, loving response to God’s grace. This is, as Paul agrees, “faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:6), demonstrated by a Christian in ‘what they do’. This is what discipleship is all about.***

**You can read more about the Faith | Works Conundrum [here](#) or Discipleship [here](#).**

**This article was first published 2 March 2020**

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# Searching For Identity

*“If I find in myself desires nothing in this world will satisfy. I can only conclude that I was not made for here.” | C S Lewis*

## Searching For Identity

I want to confess, at the outset, that as I was attempting to put down some of the thoughts I wanted to share relating to identity, my mind ran an internal commentary about myself. Thoughts such as, “*what will people think of me?*“, “*how will I be perceived?*“, “*I wonder if they’ll think ‘this’ thing or ‘that’ thing* ” ran on loop in my brain. I felt overwhelmed at the thought of showing up, convinced that I’m extremely flawed (and therefore inadequate to be sharing anything of value), anxious about my capacity to sufficiently convey and do justice to God’s truths, and wondering, perhaps, at whether I’m even the most articulate person in the world to be attempting to do so!

It struck me as really quite ironic that I was wrestling with my identity **as I prepared to write and share about identity!** I guess it seemed to prove, at least to me, that our identity, [our true identity](#) is something that we have to work hard at reminding ourselves of and something we all have struggled with or will struggle with throughout our lives.

I want to refer to a particular quote which I love – Colossians 1:13

*“For He [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” | Colossians 1:13 (ESV)*

How truly life-changing! In becoming [disciples of Jesus](#), we've also become subjects of his kingdom – living in the sphere where Jesus rules!

## **We Are Kingdom People!**

I think this is the first important truth we need to know, believe and establish at our core when we start to think about our identity and who we are. Before we relate ourselves to anyone (or anything) else in our lives, we are first and foremost [kingdom people](#) and **Jesus is our king!**

Choosing to be a Christian has its origins in believing the things about Jesus, 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 has first claim on our affections, he is the motivating force in our decisions and the final judge of our soul (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).

Perhaps we need to take a step back and consider the powerful force that enacted this transfer from the dominion of darkness. The motivating force in all of this was love – the love of an eternal God and the love of a righteous king, [who willingly died](#) for those who were still his enemies. While we were still in darkness, Jesus died for us. This is the meaning of '[saving grace](#)' – undeserved, unmerited and entirely outworked without our help or contribution.

*“Christianity is not about our disciplined pursuit of God but about God's relentless pursuit of us – to the point of Jesus dying on a cross for us that we might become His friends. The inexhaustible God loves us so intensely that every time we turn to Him after wandering from His love for us, all heaven*

*breaks out in a thunderous celebration (Luke 15:7)*

*Most of us believe this intellectually. This is the message of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Experiencing this infinite love in our hearts, however, is another matter. The sinister voices of the surrounding world and our pasts are powerful. They repeat the deeply-held, negative beliefs we may have learned in our families and cultures growing up:*

- I am a mistake*
- I am a burden*
- I am stupid*
- I am worthless*
- I am not allowed to make mistakes*
- I must be approved of by certain people to feel ok*
- I don't have the right to experience joy and pleasure*
- I don't have the right to assert myself and say what I think and feel*
- I don't have a right to feel*
- I am value-based on my intelligence, wealth, and what I do, not for who I am.*

*It is astounding how many deeply committed followers of Jesus would affirm that the preceding statements articulate how they truly feel about themselves. Like the prodigal son, they are content to relate to God as hired servants, rather than enjoy the full privileges of sons and daughters of our heavenly Father (Luke 15: 11-21)" – Peter Scazzero*

*"Whom the Son sets free is free indeed!" | John 8:36 (ESV)*

Perhaps we are also more willing at times to relate to God as slaves still chained in the dominion of darkness than of kingdom people, set free and redeemed by the Son and the king!

## **The Process Of Discipleship**

Discipleship – being people of the kingdom – is a process that

moves us from being spiritually and emotionally immature children to being fully mature and developed adults – “*people dedicated to God, and capable and equipped for every good work.*” (2 Timothy 3:17, NET).

This process of discipleship is a principle-centered, character-based, “inside out” approach to developing our authentic self in Christ. It means to start first with ourselves; even more fundamentally, to start with the most inside part of self – our core – and to honestly analyse our paradigms, our character, and our motives and to realign those with the king we are serving, with the master we are following.

I think a lot of us struggle with having a clear sense of who we are, and our Christian life is often theory rather than practice, layering over our core, rather than challenging ourselves to examine what lies at the heart of us. This process of layering – creating and developing a false self over the top of core emotional truths – ensures that we remain entrapped and enslaved to ‘the old man’, rather than liberated in Jesus as a [new creation](#).

It takes courage to decide to live differently, to follow Jesus into the unknown and to be committed to emotional and spiritual reality. It takes courage to define ourselves by how God sees us – deeply loved, despite our flaws and to live from that basis of [grace](#) in our Christian discipleship.

*“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is an illusion.” | Brennan Manning*

I’d really like to encourage us all, but especially those of you who might be really struggling with identity right now in your life, to give real attention to developing your authentic self in Jesus.

1. Pay attention to your interior (the “heart of you”) in silence and solitude.
2. Find trusted companions to help you along the way.
3. Move out of your comfort zone.
4. Pray for courage.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are God’s children. Our existence is now framed by Christ’s life – who is [a life-giving Spirit](#) (Romans 8:16).

Here are some core, emotional truths that we can believe and take deep into our hearts, as much-loved children of God: We are created in God’s own image (Genesis 1:27), the crowning glory of His creative work (Psalm 8:5). We are incredibly unique and known intimately by God (Psalm 139:13-16) and we are more valuable to Him than many sparrows (Matthew 10:31). Even when we have travelled far from His spirituality (Romans 3:23), He loved the world so much He sent His son to die for us (John 3:16). While we were still ‘at enmity’ with Him, He reached out to reconcile us back to Him (Romans 5:8-10). His grace, not our sin, has the final word in our position before Him (Romans 5:20). Those who step into His grace are saved (Romans 10:13), we are born-again (1 Peter 1:3), adopted as God’s children and positioned as His heirs (Ephesians 1:5, 1 John 3:2, Romans 8:16-17). **We belong to God and He loves us with the love of a perfect Father** (John 14:18, 1 John 3:1).

*“...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*

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**If you are struggling with your identity as a disciple or want to understand more about God’s work of grace in your life (and how that causes radical transformation), I would highly recommend reading the following two books: “What’s So Amazing About Grace” by Phillip Yancey and “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” by Peter Scazzero.**

**The Christian life isn’t always easy and the next step isn’t always clear. Sometimes we need courage to take that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.**

**This article was first published on 27 April 2020**