

# 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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## **Come Walk With Me**

**(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)**

Come walk with Me.

Imagine we are once again in Eden, walking together in the cool shade of the trees.

Listen to the sound of the great river, flowing through My garden paradise. Hear the rush of its distributaries, flowing north, east, south, and westward out from My garden. Living water springs from this place, refreshing and pure.

Close your eyes and breathe in the rich, loamy scent of this good earth. There is gold here, and precious stones too, hidden in abundance beneath the surface. Catch the sweet scent of resin floating on the crisp, clean air, the call of the mountain eagle soaring up and away from his nest, the whisper of the wind through the pasture grasses.

I am here with you. I am beside you, all around you. I go before you and I come after you; a burning torch and a defensive shield. I am closer than your very own breath. Nothing will hurt you in this place.

Catch your breath. Rest beside the quiet pools where you will

find water for your thirsty soul. Rest here in the stillness. Feel My presence and be restored.

I see your weariness, your unsettled and aching heart. I know your questions and feel your pain. I see the heavy burdens that you are carrying.

Have you forgotten what a life walking with Me should be like? Have you forgotten that I am the One who has breathed life into your dry bones, that I know the very heart of you, and that I love you?

I am your refuge, your redeemer, your restorer. Lay your burdens down.

Rest alongside Me now, beside the still water, and let Me remind you of My love.

You are made for life, an abundant, overflowing, God-shaped and God-filled life. Of everything made in the beginning, your kind alone were made in My image, made to reflect My glory. Body and soul, you are marvellously made.

You were made for belonging, with others like yourself but most of all, with Me. You were made good, so, so good.

When catastrophe fell in Eden and a great chasm arose between us, I was not defeated. When darkness fell in your world, My light shone even brighter, a shimmering beacon of hope to bring you home. I had known from the beginning that this would happen and I had already made a way.

I sent My light into your world; the glory of My presence cutting through the darkness and lighting your path back to Me. I called you to Me and you heard the sound of My voice. Like a sheep that had wandered and was lost, you have returned to Me, the great shepherd of your soul.

As you drew close to Me, I drew ever closer to you; can you not feel Me close even now? I have not left you, you are not

walking alone.

You feel small and insignificant but I tell you, you are My deeply treasured child. Does your heart not stir within you, as My Spirit testifies to this truth?

You say you are weak but I tell you, My power is made perfect in your weakness. I have put eternity deep within you, like treasure in jars of clay.

You say you feel inadequate and unworthy but I tell you that you have been made white like snow, whole and worthy in My righteousness. You say you didn't know My saving power could look like this and I tell you, this is *grace*, *My grace*, and it is sufficient for you.

I am the bedrock on which your feet find firm footing, the Alpha and Omega, encircling you in My safety and protection. I will hide you in the shadow of My feathered wings and My faithfulness will be a shield for you throughout all your days.

I have wept for you, fought for you, bled for you, died for you, and I have been made alive again, for you.

There is nothing I wouldn't do for you.

Quiet those voices in your head, clamouring to be heard, telling you that you must earn My favour, that you must do something to deserve My love. I have borne the cost of our reconciling, it is My gift to you. I have secured your passage home and I will walk that path with you.

Quiet those voices around you, telling you that simply being in Me isn't enough. I tell you, I Am leading you and renewing you and transforming you. You need only abide in Me.

The curse of sin is broken. I have broken it and you are free in Me. My life flows into yours, My Spirit breathing its refreshing wind into your heart. Walk with Me and work with Me

and you'll recover your life.

Are you feeling burned out, forced into patterns that are ill-fitting and heavy? Are you tired and anxious, carrying burdens too heavy to bear? I say again, lay those burdens down.

Lift up your weary head and take heart. I am still here, I have always been here and I will never leave you nor forsake you. The good work that I've begun in you, I promise faithfully to complete.

Come walk with Me, I'm all you need.

*"So you'll go out in joy, you'll be led into a whole and complete life. The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song. All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause. No more thistles, but giant sequoias, no more thornbushes, but stately pines—monuments to me, to God, living and lasting evidence of God." | Isaiah 55:12-13, MSG*