

# New Beginnings

God is all about new beginnings. We see the story of humanity starting out in Genesis with a new beginning; light and order being formed out of darkness and chaos.

And we see this theme of light and order echoed in the [new beginning that Christians find in Jesus](#). In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul the Apostle confirms that *“if anyone is in Christ, they have become a new person, a ‘new creation’. The old life is gone, a new life has begun. And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.”* (NLT)

This is, of course, one of the key aspects of the gospel message of good news.

## The Gospel Initiative

In the beginning, God made humans in His image, to be in close, harmonious relationship with Him – His family – and be His perfect image-bearers on this earth. But the first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned and in doing so, caused damage and disruption to the relationship between God and humanity. They were no longer able to be God’s perfect image-bearers, as He had purposed for them, and were now subject to mortality and death, which would separate them from God for eternity.

Much of the Bible’s message is subsequently taken up in telling the story of God’s efforts to address the problem of sin, and its consequent outcome, on our behalf. God began this firstly through a single man [Abraham](#), in whom He promises to bless the whole world (Genesis 12:1-3), then through a chosen people, the nation of Israel, who were Abraham’s descendants (Isaiah 43:10), and then finally, through His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, the greatest of all Abraham’s descendants (Revelation 3:14).

No one who came before Jesus was able to live a perfect life.

Then Jesus arrived on the scene, a new kind of human, who fulfilled God's law and lived the perfect life as God's ideal image bearer. He willingly gave himself on behalf of the world as [a perfect sacrifice for sin](#). He died on the cross for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2) and was raised to life again three days later in a glorious new beginning (John 20:16-18). He was the first of many whom God promises will be just like him, if they confess Jesus as Lord and saviour (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). By [being baptised](#) "into Jesus", a person becomes a new kind of human – "a new creation"- and a whole new life begins.

This invitation to confess Jesus as Lord, to repent of our sins and to trust in Jesus' sacrifice for our forgiveness, committing to a new life 'in him', following him in all things, is offered to everyone! (2 Peter 3:9). God doesn't want [anyone to be lost](#) – so if you are convicted in your heart of sin and want to be baptised into Jesus, don't hesitate! (If you'd like to speak more about baptism with someone, I'd love to chat! You can get in touch via my contact details [here](#)).

Once a person has made [a commitment](#) to a new life by being baptised, they become part of the family of God. It's a new start, a new beginning, with a whole new life ahead of them.

But, as with new year's resolutions, new beginnings have a way of losing their gloss and the excitement and determination can begin to fade. The Christian life is full of ups and downs and we can lose our passion, become discouraged, or forget the reasons why we even chose this life to begin with.

There are a couple of great examples of new beginnings found in the Bible that I believe can help us in this Christian life – whether we're just starting out or whether we've been at it for a while.

# The Story Of Ruth

The first example is [the story of Ruth](#). You may already be familiar with the background of Ruth's story. She was a widowed Moabite woman, married to an Israelite man who had relocated to Moab ten years earlier. Upon his death, she chose to leave her country of birth and travel back to Israel, with her mother-in-law, both of them with little possessions and a very uncertain future. Her "new beginning", following on from the death of her husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law certainly looked bleak and her circumstances were very reduced. Her position in Israelite society would be expected to be marginal at best – the Moabites had been cursed in earlier times for their opposition and hostility to Israel (Numbers 24:9), and naturalised Moabites were forever excluded from the congregation of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3).

We might initially look at her story and assume she was to be simply an inconsequential outsider to the plan of God, peripheral to His purpose. Her 'new beginning' certainly didn't shine with the kind of hope and 'homecoming' we would expect.

Our lives can sometimes look like Ruth's story and we may struggle to see through the reduced circumstances of our current moment, viewing them as the end rather than the beginning.

But God loves a good plot twist. When we think things are hopeless and we cannot see a way through, He confounds us, perfectly weaving our own personal stories into the greatest story of all. What can seem like the end is really a different kind of beginning and those circumstances that seem hopeless are actually leading us to something beyond our expectations.

**If you're in a season that feels like the end rather than the beginning, don't despair and feel that God has given up on your life. He hasn't.**

If you're struggling with addictions, with issues in your relationships, with spiritual drift, or financial strain, don't feel that these things signal the end. God is still there and He is still working. You just need to believe that. The only thing that Ruth really had to go on was faith – faith that the end of her story would be worth the wait – and that's all you need too, even if your faith is only the size of a mustard seed!

Believe that God, who is Himself the beginning and the end of all things, is still intimately involved in your story, even if you're struggling to see the next chapter. The prophet Malachi tells us that the names of those whose lives honour God are specially written in His book – and that they are God's treasured possession. God's heart towards them is as a father of his son (Malachi 3:16). If all you take from today is this: remember you are greatly loved and God is for you!

## **The Story Of Nehemiah**

The second example is the story of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. After being in exile for many years, the people of Israel had been allowed to return and had finally begun rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. This occurred under the leadership of firstly men called Zerubbabel and Ezra, and finally, a man called Nehemiah, who was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, King of Persia. It was a time of great hope and fearless faith.

Rebuilding took place in three waves, with the building of the walls coming last, in the third wave under Nehemiah's leadership. This endeavour began with singleness of purpose and a spirit of reformation but after only 26 days into the project, people became discouraged and wanted to give up. Only 26 days in! Less than four weeks! They had become overwhelmed by fatigue, frustration, opposition, and fear.

Pressures from without, burnout from within, unreasonable

expectations, and fear of failure. Many Christians feel all these emotions and challenges, probably many times, at different stages in their Christian life. As with the people in Nehemiah's time, Christians need to be reminded of their purpose and reinvigorated with a sense of mission!

*"If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves" | Proverbs 29:18, MSG*

**If you're in a season of discouragement and feel like you're drifting or have lost your sense of purpose, this message is for you. Do not give up!**

Although our purpose and mission may look different today from theirs back then, it's all part of the great story that God is telling. And we need to remind ourselves of this regularly, to maintain our focus and vision. New beginnings, even ones that start with passion and fearlessness, soon become simply 'the job at hand', and we need to be mindful of all the pressures, emotions, and challenges that come with it. ***It can be easy to lose sight of the fact that we're involved in the greatest, most radical project in all of history!*** What we do is important and *does* have value, even if we can't quite see through to the other side of the project right now.

The message from the story of Nehemiah is to make time to regularly step aside from everything that's going on in our lives and remind ourselves of the story that God is telling, and that we're now part of.

Humanity was always created with purpose, to be God's perfect image-bearers and the scope of this is so much greater than you or I, in our current moment. Remind yourself of the importance of the things you do every day, in pursuit of this purpose and mission, whether small or great. And realise that every contribution you make, in your ministry to God, has eternal significance.

How do you do this? Well, here's some ideas. Take 10 minutes out to read your favourite Bible chapter. Haven't got one? Make it your mission to find one. Have a coffee with a friend. Catch up with a mate after work. Invite another family around for dinner and reconnect over the good news in Jesus. Listen to a Christian podcast. Take a half-hour out for your own personal worship session with all your favourite songs – or make it bigger and include others! Take some quiet moments to think about your personal skills and gifts and consider what you can bring to ministry in your church. Start a new Christian book. Volunteer your time to help those more disadvantaged than yourself. Have a heart-to-heart conversation with God.

How about setting a reminder in your phone, in your diary, calendar, or notebook, and, using the story of Nehemiah as an example, remind yourself at least every 26 days to 'check-in and show up'. Go on, do it right now!

## **The New Covenant**

Finally, I want to remind us of what has made all of this possible – the new covenant that came about through the death of Jesus Christ.

*“In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’ | Luke 22:20, NIV*

*“Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.” | Hebrews 7:22, NIV*

*“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may*

*receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” – Hebrews 9:14-15 | NIV*

God has personally dealt with the human condition of sin through the giving of His only Son. There is forgiveness of sins to all through this new covenant. By his blood and in his name, in his freedom we are free! There is no new beginning as awesome as the new beginning we find in Jesus Christ!

Amen!

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## **The Parallels In Communion**

*“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” | 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, ESV*

### **We Who Are Many Are One**

Paul the Apostle's words, here in Corinthians, reference the deep and powerful truth which is embedded in the Christian ordinance of communion. The truth that, in taking the cup and sharing the bread, we are fully participating in Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus is the common element that binds believers together and his sacrifice is what makes the new resurrection life possible for every person who believes in

his saving name.

This participation together in drinking wine and breaking bread is a compelling witness to the 'common union' believers share in the blood and body of Christ, the sharing in his sin-conquering death and his life-giving resurrection. There is nothing more powerful or significant for a church community than remembering the very thing which gave the church its birth and which binds each member together as part of 'the whole'.

For this reason, sharing communion is not just about remembering the death of Jesus, including the anguish, surrender, and sacrifice but also about celebrating his resurrection; the vanquishing of sin and the victory over death, won for every person who associates with his name. The new creation was born from his sacrifice and confirmed by his resurrected life, of which we are now all a part, bound together by the life-giving spirit of Jesus himself.

Sharing communion together as believers is primarily a time for celebration, for thanksgiving and praise, for "by his blood and in his name, in his freedom we are free!"

In celebrating this ordinance together, believers are not just connected to Jesus but to each other. It's significant that Jesus associates the institution of communion – which speaks of his sacrifice and death, motivated by love – with the importance of his followers showing his love by **loving one another**.

During the meal (Matthew 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26, Luke 22:7–39, and John 13:1–17:26), Jesus takes the bread and shares it with his disciples, telling them that it is symbolic of his body, soon to be broken for them in death. He shares the cup of wine, telling them it is a symbol of his blood, poured out for the forgiveness of their sins.

He gently tells his disciples that he will only be with them a



little longer, referencing, of course, his impending betrayal and crucifixion. He then gives them a 'new commandment', to live by once he is gone:

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you 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

Jesus first instituted the ordinance of communion, by which his followers would remember him, during his last meal on earth with his closest disciples, but this meal had its roots in a much deeper, incredibly powerful story of deliverance and freedom.

## **A Story Of Deliverance**

The institution of communion had its origins in an ancient Jewish festive meal known as 'Passover. Celebrated annually, it commemorated the deliverance of the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt.

The early chapters of the book of Exodus tell of the origins and background of the Passover (Exodus 1-12). Forcibly enslaved upon the accession of a new Pharaoh to the Egyptian throne, the people of Israel were subjected to cruelty, forced labour, and intolerable work and living conditions. In an effort to cull their numbers, Pharaoh had issued a directive of neonaticide for any male baby born. As soon as the baby was delivered, he was to be killed by the attending midwives. It was a terrible time for the people of Israel – cruelly mistreated and living in hopelessness, with no means to save themselves.

With heavy burdens bitterly borne, they desperately lifted their voices heavenward. God heard their cries for rescue and remembers his promises to their patriarchs [Abraham](#), Isaac, and Jacob, long ago (Exodus 2:24).

*“And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...” – Exodus 3:7-9*

God stepped into their misery and suffering and promises to deliver them out of the affliction of Egypt. Through a series of plagues, demonstrating His almighty power, and the final dramatic death of Egypt’s own firstborn, God exercises His powerful arm of redemption and leads his people out of slavery to freedom and their promised land.

On the night of their leaving, the Israelites prepared unleavened bread and lamb, roasted over the fire. The lamb’s blood was brushed on the lintel and two doorposts of every Israelite home. When the Angel of Death went throughout Egypt, killing the firstborn, he would see the blood and ‘pass over’ that house, sparing all those who were inside.

The night of Passover marked the end of slavery and brought deliverance and the beginning of the people of Israel’s journey towards the promised land. Through death and sacrifice, came new life and hope.

The types that can be seen in this event for a Christian’s new life are clear. It’s no coincidence that Jesus uses this commemorative Passover meal, already 1,500 years old by this time and full of ancient symbology and meaning, to bring his disciples’ attention to his own impending death, through which their rescue from ‘slavery to sin’ will be achieved.

## **Parallels In Leaving Egypt**

Paul the Apostle observes that the events of Israel’s exodus and subsequent journey through the wilderness towards the promised land are parallels of a Christian’s new life in Jesus

(1 Corinthians 10:1-13). He uses Egypt as a metaphor for sin and spiritual darkness and the exodus as an example of the freedom Christians experience in being rescued from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13).

The **first parallel** to note is that of slavery. Just as the people of Israel were completely enslaved to the Egyptian Pharaoh, we are all slaves to sin, born so at birth and only confirmed throughout our lives by our sinful deeds (Romans 5:12, John 8:34). Yet God provided a deliverer, as He did for Israel, and the blood of this deliverer gives [salvation from death](#), which we are promised no longer has any hold over us (John 11:25. 1 Corinthians 15:55).

The **second parallel** is, of course, the sacrificial lamb. It is John the Baptist who first introduces Jesus as 'the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Isaiah, a prophet in Old Testament writings, also prophesied of one who would come to bear the sins of the world and that he would be 'led like a lamb to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53:7). The final book in the Bible, Revelation, confirms that Jesus was indeed the Lamb of God 'slain from the foundation of the world' (1 Peter 1:19, Revelation 13:8).

The theme of a sacrificial lamb has been constant throughout scripture (Genesis 3:21, Genesis 22:8, Numbers 9:12, Ezra 6:19, 2 Chronicles 35:11) and always intended to point forward to Jesus, who would be the ultimate sacrifice for all those who wanted to escape their inherent slavery to sin and death.

The **third parallel** is the deliverer himself. God raised up Moses, a natural-born Israelite to lead His people from Egypt. Adopted into Pharaoh's court as a baby and growing up under the very nose of the ruler of his people, Moses was not an outsider or a stranger but a man just like the people whom he would rescue and lead to freedom. The people of Israel were *his* people and their suffering was intimately connected with the suffering of *his* family.

One of the prophecies concerning Jesus was that he would be 'called out of Egypt'. This reveals the deeper truth about [Jesus' connection to the people he would come to save](#).

*"And he [Joseph] rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [Hosea 11:1], "Out of Egypt I called my son."  
| Matthew 2:14-15, ESV*

Jesus' redemptive work on behalf of humanity was deeply connected to his own humanity. Although he was the Son of God, and radiant with his Father's glory, he participated in every way in all the experiences of what it means to be human. His ability to sympathise with us and to reconcile on our behalf springs from a complete understanding of what it is like to be human; with all our doubts, fears, temptations, and failures, without ever failing himself. He understood humans because he was human.

A **fourth parallel** exists in connection with the Passover and Exodus – that is, the crossing of the Red Sea. Paul the Apostle calls this crossing being 'baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Corinthians 10:1) and comments that the Israelites all drank the same spiritual drink, which was Christ.

*"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." | 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, ESV*

Like the people of Israel, every person who desires to follow Jesus and 'drink from that spiritual rock' must first pass

through the water of baptism, 'under the cloud and through the sea'. The journey only truly begins on the other side of the ocean.

These parallels in the exodus story to our own Christian salvation are remarkable. They demonstrate the absolute power of God to achieve His purpose and that His plan of salvation has been in motion from the beginning of the world. God is on the move and God has always been on the move!

Paul reminds his readers that "all these things [that occurred to Israel] happened to them as examples for us" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Their defeats, joys, sufferings and victories were experienced as people who were 'God's witnesses' (Isaiah 43:10) and from their stories, we can draw powerful truths about what God has done and is still doing for us.

The fact is, God moved heaven and earth to rescue His people Israel and He has done nothing less than this for us, through the sending of His son, while we were still 'in Egypt'.

*"But God proves His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." | Romans 5:8, ESV*

Through something as simple as bread and wine, Christians are reminded of God's promise of deliverance and of their forgiveness and freedom gifted through Jesus' sacrifice. It is a tangible witness to the transforming power of [the Gospel](#) in people's lives and the faithfulness of an eternal God.

[Disciples of Jesus](#) – Christians – have continued to celebrate this new covenant since that time, through the participation together of *communion*, the eating of bread and the drinking of wine 'in remembrance of Jesus'.

*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting*

*men's trespasses against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God...." | 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, BSB*

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**If the story of the Exodus has resonated with you; if you recognise that you are 'in Egypt', in slavery to sin and subject to the power of death and you want rescue, I implore you on behalf of Christ – be saved! (2 Corinthians 5:20) God had so much love for the world that He gave His one and only Son, for everyone, and that includes you! The Gospel is Good News for every person and I believe God is still making a move, doing exciting things right here in the Northern Rivers! I'd love to help you be reconciled to Him! (If you're unsure whether the Christian life is for you and just want to chat it over, with no pressure or expectation, I'd love to hear from you too). [Follow the link](#) to get in touch.**

**Keen to learn more about the book of Exodus? Head on over to [The Bible Project](#) website (click the link) where you'll find a couple of great overview videos.**