

The Dark Heart Of Christmas

Christmas is a unique time of year.

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

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

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

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

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

Without sin, there would be no need for redemption or reconciliation with God. Without sin, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to come “to save his people” (Matthew

1:21). Without sin, Jesus would not have had to die. At the heart of the Christmas narrative lies a profound hopelessness—a darkness that calls us to pause and reflect.

Jesus | The Hope Of The World

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

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

“Comfort, comfort my people,” the prophet Isaiah would write, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins.” Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting, “Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God! Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places. Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!” | Isaiah 40:1-3

It’s Definitely Good News

“Keep it positive,” my daughter urged when I mentioned I was writing about the deeper, darker side of Christmas. “Not

everything has to be a negative.” And I do understand her point. Christmas, with its twinkling lights, joyful songs, and festive feasts, is a season meant for happiness and celebration.

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

But I think the answer should be yes.

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

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

God-With-Us

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Incarnation Of The Word

In the beginning, the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.

When God Moved Into The Neighbourhood

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Glory, All-In-All

I think our view or perspective of God and His intentions may have been shaped by many things, but the Bible seems to set the narrative straight pretty much right away, declaring His intent and purpose from the beginning. We read in Genesis 1:6 that God said *"Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."* Further, God declares in Numbers 14:21 that *"the whole earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD."*

God's desire has always been for us to be like Him and for Him to dwell with us, utterly and completely.

He intended us to not only be like Him but for us to also rule over His good creation on His behalf, exhibiting his justice, goodness, and truth throughout the earth. Affirming God's sovereignty, reflected in the way we choose to live like Him, gives shape and purpose to the role for which humanity was created (and, later in scripture, why and how [the church](#) also finds her purpose).

How amazing – the King of all the earth desired to make us in His image and in His likeness so that we might reflect His

glory – the weight and splendour of all that He is, and so that everywhere one might look – east, west, north or south – all that can be seen and felt is God.

God dwelt with us once, long ago, in a garden. His glory and splendour could be seen then, as humanity and God walked together in perfect harmony and everything was *very good*. Only one thing remained in order to make this eternal; the application of our free will to partner with God and undertake this rule on His terms, a display of obedience and commitment to Him.

This isn't what the first humans choose, though, and the third chapter of Genesis starkly illustrates the terrible outcome; banishment from His presence and separation from His glory.

The book of Genesis is a means to a theological end; its purpose to illustrate in historical-mythological language God's relationship to creation and His intention of dwelling with us. *"The whole purpose of Genesis 1 is to set the ideal human community – a place in which the image of God, or the imitation of God, is actually going to be realised. That, of course, gets distorted in Genesis 3 when humans disobey God. But the first chapter is outlining the ideal."* (Professor C. John Collins).

Genesis 1–11, then, is the founding story of humanity, ending in crisis. These narratives give a real and true assessment of God's initial purposes and the human plight. Genesis 12–50 is the founding story of the nation with whom the covenant is eventually made at Sinai. The covenant establishes the relationship to Abraham and his descendants, provides the structure for living in God's presence, and lays the foundation for God's presence to be established on earth. – Biologos

The Purpose Of Israel

The people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, were the chosen people through whom God intended for all the world to learn of Him and be invited into a restored relationship with Him. After their epic deliverance from slavery in Egypt and a desperate flight through the Red Sea, the book of Exodus tells the story of Israel's journey under the leadership of Moses to Mount Sinai. There, they find its summit is wrapped in thick smoke and access to its base must be limited *because the Lord had descended on it in fire.*

Through rolling thunder and lightning, God makes solemn promises to them in that place. He intends to make of them a *"holy nation, and a kingdom of priests"*, contingent on their faithfulness to His covenant. He gives them ten commandments, so they might understand His holiness and His laws, by which their lives and worship of Him were to be governed. They will be witnesses to the nations around them of the glory and sovereignty of the God, who not only rules over them but also dwells with them.

It was also at Mount Sinai that *the tabernacle* – the *residence or dwelling place of God* was to be constructed. Designed to be able to be transported, it was to be a reminder that God was with them always, dwelling in their midst and travelling with them throughout all their journeys. Housed within *the holiest of holies* inside the tabernacle would be *the ark of the covenant* – a pure, gold-covered wooden chest with an elaborate lid, ornamented with two golden cherubim, called *the mercy seat*. Inside the ark would be placed the *two stone tablets of the ten commandments*.

Swathed in an impermanent, transitory wrapping of tapestry curtains covered in images of cherubim, the glory of God descended and *tabernacled* amongst them. A large cloud of light and mist settled overhead, signaling God's presence was there in their midst. They would know it was time to set out when

the cloud lifted but until then, they waited and rested in the presence of the Lord.

God had moved into the neighbourhood.

Solomon Builds A Temple

The tabernacle was an itinerant dwelling place, as the people of Israel would be on the move, as it turns out, for 40 years. When they finally reached the end of their wilderness wanderings and settled in the promised land, it would be many more years before a permanent structure was built to welcome God's glory.

Under the reign of King Solomon the Wise, son of the great [King David](#), a glorious temple was constructed, some 480 years after the Great Exodus. Built with exquisite craftsmanship, using masterfully quarried stone blocks, and cedar and cyprus timbers from the great forests of Lebanon, it was a magnificent building dedicated to the God of Israel and intended as the place in which He would dwell with His people in a more permanent way.

Solomon's words at the dedication of the temple are beautifully moving to read:

"I have built this Temple to honor the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And I have prepared a place there for the Ark, which contains the covenant that the LORD made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire community of Israel. He lifted his hands toward heaven, and he prayed, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in all of heaven above or on the earth below. You keep your covenant and show unfailing love to all who walk before you in wholehearted devotion. You have kept your promise to your servant David, my father. You made that promise with your own mouth, and with your own hands you have fulfilled it today.

And now, O LORD, God of Israel, carry out the additional promise you made to your servant David, my father. For you said to him, 'If your descendants guard their behavior and faithfully follow me as you have done, one of them will always sit on the throne of Israel.' Now, O God of Israel, fulfill this promise to your servant David, my father. But will God really dwell on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"
| 1 Kings 8:20-27, NLT

Solomon asks an important question. Will God really dwell on the earth, with us?

The answer is yes, but as humanity would come to understand, the living God desires to dwell not in temples made of wood and stone but in a living temple, in a structure softer and more pliable than stone, more ancient and beautiful than Solomon's temple or the wilderness tabernacle before that.

He longs to dwell *with us, in us*, utterly and completely.

The people of Israel, however, struggled with their unique and privileged identity. They would worship and serve God for a season and then, when things were going well, they would become complacent and selfish, turning aside to worship gods made of wood and stone, like the nations around them. They abandoned their covenant with God, over and over again.

They paid little heed to the warnings from prophets like Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Ezekiel about the impending doom that would come upon Jerusalem, should they remain feckless and unfaithful.

Finally, Ezekiel is given a sobering vision of the end; of the moment that God's glory will leave the presence of His covenant people.

"Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the

house, when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. And the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks. Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.” | Ezekiel 10:4-5, 18-19, 11:22-23

The God Who Dwells With Us

The nation of Israel had forgotten that God is not tethered to a building and His desire is not to dwell in a place, *but in a people*.

The final pages of the Old Testament come to a close with the prophetic words of Malachi, written around 460-430 BC. We find the people of Israel have now returned from nearly 130 years of exile and are back in the land of their ancestors. Yet the nation is vastly diminished. The temple has been restored under the leadership of Nehemiah but it is a much smaller building than the previous, gloriously constructed temple of King Solomon's days. Despite Ezekiel's later vision which seemed to offer the promise of God's presence (Ezekiel 43:2), the glory of the Lord has not returned to this temple.

Yet there is still hope to be found. Isaiah speaks these

comforting words to Israel around the time of their return from exile in Babylon:

“Comfort, comfort my people”, says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” | Isaiah 40:1-5, ESV

John the Baptist deliberately echos these words, over 700 years later, to announce the arrival of Jesus Christ (found in John 1:1-18).

The gospel of John (the Apostle, not Baptist) opens with an otherwordly 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 whom all things have been brought into being, who is the light and life of humanity, and who *became flesh and dwelt among us*.

He concludes his origin account with a brief explanation as to his role. “I am”, he simply says “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord”.

As author and theologian, Eugene H Peterson puts it (and where the title of this article is taken from), God had moved into the neighbourhood (Zechariah 2:10, John 1:14).

“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

God's Temple Is A Person

The glory of the Lord had returned to dwell among His people. But this time it was wrapped in a perishable, temporary covering [of flesh and bone](#). This was the true temple of the living God, the house of God in which there are many rooms, and which, though it would be destroyed, would be rebuilt again in just three days, an eternal life-giving spirit for all who would enter in (John 2:19-21, John 14:2).

A temple with just a single door, larger on the inside than on the outside, where worshippers as numerous as the stars of heaven would find sacred space.

A place where people could fully enter instead of only just drawing near. A place where the dividing wall would be broken down and peace would be found instead of hostility. A place where there once had stood a wall, but now there would be a way; many brought near by the blood of Christ himself.

A place where people and God could meet, at last, face to face and be reunited.

A place where there once had been two, but now there would be one; humanity reborn in this holiest of places with God dwelling utterly and completely in and with His people.

All the narratives of the Old Testament had been simply shadows and markers, one-dimensional illustrations intended to point the world to the real story God had been writing all along, to the reality that God had intended from the beginning. God would dwell, as He has always intended, among people, *in people*; in a kingdom of priests ransomed to Him by the precious blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

The glory of God dwelt among us, *tabernacled with us* in the person of Jesus Christ, God-With-Us, and it's in the truest of all temples – Jesus – that all things become possible.

He was all things; the presence of God dwelling fully with us, the glory of God in our midst, the way, the gate, the faithful shepherd, the life, the resurrection and victorious conqueror of death itself, our priest, our peace, the bright and morning star, and the true temple of the living God into whom we can fully enter, through the power of the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20).

“Therefore, brethren, we have boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus.” | Hebrews 10:19, Weymouth

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” | Ephesians 2:18-22, ESV

Worthy To Enter Into Glory

It's strange – the more I read the Bible, the more complex it seems, and yet the simpler it becomes. Sure, it's full of strange visions and obscure prophecies, lamentations and poetry, passages offering wisdom for life, and chapters delving into deep theological insights about God and humanity.

Reading the vivid and apocalyptic language of Revelation, for example, stirs our blood while immersing ourselves in the trials and tribulations of faithful Job pulls at our hearts.

The Bible is a completely magnificent book, the traverse of which is the journey of a lifetime.

But there really is only one take-home point in all of it. God

wants to *dwell with us*, all-in-all, utterly and completely, in glory.

It's what we were created for, yet humanity, left to ourselves, is unable to echo God's holiness, His perfection, His righteousness, and His supreme goodness. The nation of Israel, first specifically chosen to be God's people, showed the truth of this. Their faithless, inconsistent example and half-hearted desire for God are a reflection of all humanity.

We could never enter into God's temple, into the very presence of His glory without help. And Jesus was sent to be that help, to make a way, to break down the wall, to bring us back to God. Holy, innocent, unstained and exalted above the heavens, he is the guarantor of a superior covenant; both the presence, the pardon, and the promise of God.

Jesus makes everything possible.

All of scripture, in a million different ways, is simply telling us the truth of this; that in Jesus, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

And *that* is a story worth telling.

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." | Hebrews 10:19-25, ESV

The Pauline epistles are just brimming with thoughts on this subject, too numerous to comment on here. I'm conscious I've only just scratched the surface and hope I have managed to do it some small justice. If you're looking to soak a little longer in these thoughts, I'd recommend heading on over to the book of Hebrews and starting there with a read-through of chapters 1-10...

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Shod With The Gospel Of Peace

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will inherit the earth." | Matthew 5:9 (ESV)

The Spiritual Warrior

In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul gives a striking description of a person known as the spiritual warrior, a follower of Jesus who has been powerfully equipped for warfare by the armour of God Himself. The elements or pieces of armour which make up 'the whole armour' are of God – it is His strength which believers are armed with and protected by (Ephesians 6:10-17, cp Isaiah 59:17). Paul confirms in Ephesians that we are to view the battle that we are all fighting, as believers, as a spiritual one, and that what we do in this warfare has eternal significance.

There are six pieces of armour that make up this warrior's protective battle gear:

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness
- Shoes of the Gospel of Peace
- Shield of Faith
- Helmet of Salvation
- Sword of the Spirit.

In this article, I'd like to focus on the third item, the shoes of the 'gospel of peace'. To be 'shod with peace' may initially seem like a strange inclusion in the armour of someone who is prepared for battle. What would peace and warfare have to do with each other? Surely these two terms are mutually exclusive? But first, I want to start by sharing a couple of passages from Paul's letter to the church at Rome:

*"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Carefully consider what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible on your part, **live at peace** with everyone."* | Romans 12:17-18 (ESV)

*"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us **pursue what makes for peace** and for mutual upbuilding."* | Romans 14:17-19 (ESV)

Living And Working For Peace

In his letters, Paul encourages the believers in Rome to '*live at peace with everyone, if it is possible on your part*' (Romans 12:8). He encourages them to "*pursue what leads to peace*" (Romans 14:9) and confirms that the "*kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace*".

Jesus gave his famous discourse on the mount during his earthly ministry, also known as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), where he too affirmed that those that '*work for peace*' will be the children of God (Matthew 5:9). As members of [his one body](#),

it's his peace that is to rule our hearts (Colossians 3:15).

And God, as we know, is in the peacemaking business.

So it seems contradictory that Jesus, given the title of 'Prince of Peace' long before his birth (Isaiah 9:6), should say these words:

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. " 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'" | Jesus, Matthew 10: 34 (NIV)

Luke's gospel repeats the refrain:

"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three." | Jesus, Luke 12:51 (ESV)

Initially, the commission to be peacemakers, to live at peace with everyone, together with Paul's statement that the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace, seems to be at odds with Jesus' own words and even with Paul's later language of *warfare* found in Ephesians. So I think it's helpful to consider the definition of what 'peace' is before we can understand how we are to 'work for peace' or be 'peacemakers'.

Peacekeeping Is Not Peacemaking

We can often speak about 'keeping the peace' and believe that this is the same as peacemaking. Yet peace – true peace – is defined as *'a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended.'*

Choosing not to act in violent ways towards another party whom one may be 'at war with' **doesn't equate to peace**. Just because

we don't acknowledge the reality of hostilities doesn't mean they don't exist. For example, distrust, hostility and enmity still continued during the Cold War, even though a shot was never fired. Tension was still felt and expressed by both parties and mutual distrust and enmity were still very real. And it was still known as a "war", despite there not being any actual physical warfare. Some might like to think that 'peace' was achieved, or at least a more acceptable sense of peace than physical war, but this was simply pseudo-peace, a type of peacekeeping but certainly not peacemaking.

God didn't settle for peacekeeping! In sending Jesus, He entered directly into the hostilities between Himself and humanity and brought about the cessation of war. True peace only comes when true reconciliation is achieved – that is, the ending of hostilities and the restoration of relationship.

This is why the gospel is styled **the gospel of peace** – not because it makes Christians nice, agreeable or compliant people. The gospel of peace doesn't make us nice – it [makes us new](#)! It restores our relationship with God and gives us a new identity as children of God. We are no longer enemies but friends with our Creator. This truth, this [realignment of identity](#), this cessation of hostilities, becomes one of the first weapons in the arsenal of our spiritual battle.

*"But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For **he is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, **thereby bringing the hostility to an end**. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off [Gentiles!] and peace to those who were near [Jews!]; for through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father." | Ephesians 2:13-18*

We are ready to set forth, preaching that same peace to the

world and I believe this is why it is styled as 'shoes' or 'to be shod' with the gospel of peace. Our first move of 'forward motion' after becoming Christians is framed by the gospel of peace and [reconciliation that we have received](#). We stand in and on this truth. This is the peace that Jesus spoke of leaving his disciples with, where, as it's recorded in John's gospel, he says, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (John 14:27) It is the supreme and unwavering peace of knowing that we are **friends with God**.

The Sword Of Division

So what exactly did Jesus mean when he said he didn't come to bring peace but a sword? Well, I think this is an acknowledgement that our human life is indelibly tied to the spiritual war that was set in motion in the beginning.

God made humans in His image, to be in close, harmonious relationship with Him, as His family, and to 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 consequently subject to mortality, becoming slaves to sin. Since then, humans have been engaged in a lifelong battle against the 'ruler of the dominion of darkness – sin'. We and every other human have been fighting the enemy within ourselves and others – sin – since that time (Romans 5-7).

This uncomfortable truth – that sin rules in this world and that we must reject sin if we are to follow Jesus – will bring disturbance in our natural relationships. The gospel of peace asks those who receive it to choose to behave in counter-cultural ways and this will often set believers against the 'powers that be'. Believers have been transferred out of this

dominion of sin and darkness and now serve, with thankfulness, King Jesus. The Word of God, incarnated in [the perfect king](#) and image-bearer, Jesus – is “*sharper than any sword, piercing even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.*” It discerns the thoughts and intentions at the deepest level of each one of us, seeking to transform and renew our hearts if we allow it (Colossians 1: 13; Hebrew 4:2, Romans 12:2).

Sometimes, despite our best efforts to be peacemakers, the attainment of peace in our families or wider relationships is not attained. This is the sword that Jesus spoke of, the division that would come between those who choose to follow King Jesus and those who persist in serving the ruler of this world. Yet it’s important to remember in all of this that it is a *spiritual battle*. We are not at war with people but with sin.

“We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world.” | Ephesians 6:12 (CEV)

How Do We Make Peace?

We must behave in the same way as God, who was so concerned for peace that He sent His Son “*to guide our feet into the path of peace*” (Luke 1:79, Isaiah 2:4). If our Father is a peacemaker, then we will be too!

“First, pray for those who you may be at odds with or who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). Pray by acknowledging God’s sovereign rule and pray that your enemy might acknowledge that too.

Then, in Matthew 5:47, Jesus gives the other specific example of peacemaking – love – in this text: “If you salute [greet] only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?” In other words, if there is a rupture in one of your relationships, or if there is someone who opposes you, don’t

nurse that grudge. Don't feed the animosity by ignoring and avoiding that person. That is the natural thing to do – just cross the street so that you don't have to greet them. But that is not the impulse of [the Spirit](#) of a peacemaking God, who sacrificed His Son to reconcile us to Himself and to each other.

Peacemaking tries to build bridges to people – it does not want the animosity to remain. It wants reconciliation. It wants harmony. And so it tries to show what may be the only courtesy the enemy will tolerate, namely, a greeting. The peacemaker looks the enemy right in the eye and says, “Good morning, John.” And he says it with a longing for peace in his heart, not with a phony gloss of politeness to cover his anger.” – [Desiring God](#)

A peacemaker – a child of the gospel – is someone who longs for peace and works for peace but who also acknowledges that some barriers may simply not be able to be overcome. [Allegiance to the king](#) is always of primary importance. Jesus' blessing pronounced upon those who would be 'persecuted for the sake of righteousness' demonstrates that the goal of peace is clearly subordinated to the goal of righteousness. James later supports this in his letter to believers, where he says, “The wisdom from above is **first pure, then peaceable.**” (James 3:17)

Finally, in conclusion, I believe it's an important detail that being 'shod with the gospel of peace' is listed directly after putting on 'the breastplate of righteousness', the piece of armour which protects the vital organs, particularly the heart. Before we set out anywhere to 'negotiate reconciliation' (either personal or as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace), we need to examine our hearts, testing our motives and ensuring our heart is safely guarded against personal deception or impure motives.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do

flows from it.” | Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

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.

A Christian Response To The Global Crisis

How we, as Christians, respond in times of crisis is not just vitally important for our own faith and for our witness of the gospel, it's important for the wellbeing of those around us, who may be struggling with doubts and fears in what is a very distressing and anxious time.

A Measured And Faithful Response

I want to speak plainly to a disturbing trend currently being observed amongst some, in response to the current pandemic facing the globe. It's a response that could almost be described as 'tone deaf'; that many seem to be unaware and unobservant to the fear and anxiety of the people around them and, unwittingly or not, are adding to that fear and uncertainty with ill-thought through posts or shares online. Or, even worse, they're well aware of the fear and are choosing to actively capitalise on it to promote apocalyptic predictions or outcomes. Whilst we shouldn't be ambivalent about what's going on around the globe, we also need to be measured in our response and very careful not to be

contributing to or escalating the level of panic that people may be experiencing.

When people are struggling with an uncertain future, have recently lost employment or are concerned for the wellbeing of their loved ones, Christians have both a responsibility and a privilege to point the world's attention to the One who is still in control of all. Not only that, we can choose to positively redirect the conversation, using our confidence in the God of all the earth to comfort people's hearts and settle their fears.

For Christians, times of trouble, in this particular case, the far-reaching effects of Covid-19, are, firstly, an opportunity to test and prove our own conviction; that there is One God and Father who rules over all things (Psalm 103:19, Daniel 2:21, Ephesians 4:6). We have confidence that the Father has an ongoing rescue plan for humanity and that He has given authority over to His Holy Son, Jesus Christ, who holds all things in his hand (John 3:35, Matthew 11:27). It can be difficult in times of crisis to remain convicted of this, but we must continue to have confidence in God's promises and in the power and authority vested in the name of Jesus. We acknowledge that, as Christians, we are not immune to these troubles and our prayer is not that we would be removed from this but that we would be protected from evil (John 17:15). It is our Christian ideals, in fact, that enable us to see purpose in our suffering and recognise the joy which can overcome all troubles, even the love of an everlasting Father.

"The Christian ideal is not freedom from work, but strength to do it; not freedom from temptation, but power to overcome it; not freedom from suffering, but joy in an abiding sense of the Father's love; not absence from the world, but grace to make the world better for our presence; not holy lives driven from the world, and living apart from it, but holy lives spent in the world and leavening it." – Ellicott's Commentary For English Readers.

Secondly, such crises are an opportunity to witness to the reality of a transformative gospel being outworked in our lives. We are to show good to all, as and where we are able (Galatians 6:10). We are to be thankful for those in authority and especially at a time like this, those in healthcare, who risk their own lives to treat and save others (1 Timothy 2:2). We need to remember to pray for them and assist where we can. We ought to show responsibility in following the direction of the government and officials, acknowledging measured concern for the situation we all find ourselves in and abiding by recommendations for the good of everyone (1 Peter 2:13). Now, more than ever, is the time to show consideration and restraint and to lead the world by example. It is not the time (or ever!) for Christians to display greed or selfishness but to consider those who are our neighbour and to love them, as ourselves (Romans 13:8-10). And, particularly, it is vitally important to consider those who are weak and vulnerable amongst our communities, who have always found a special place in God's heart (James 1:27; Psalm 68:5).

Trust in God's sovereignty is not to be made dependent on human expectation of a particular timetable or outcome. For the present, it is enough that God's rule is expressed in and through His Spirit. | James D G Dunn

He Is A Good, Good Father

It is our commission, as Christians, to remind the world of a good, good God, who is actively seeking to overthrow the effects of sin in the world and restore humanity to full relationship with Himself. He is the One who rescues the poor who cries for help and the fatherless, who have none to assist them (Job 29:12). He sees the grief and anxiety of the afflicted and upholds the cause of the poor and the oppressed (Psalm 82:3). We need to reaffirm and speak this truth to each other and to the world! Christians are intended to be the light of the world, bringing hope to those who have none,

especially in times of crisis and trouble.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” – Matthew 5:14, BSB

As Christians, we are emboldened to stand together now in faithful response, banishing exaggerated fear and pleading the cause of those who are afflicted and defenceless in this crisis. We need to pray, to worship and to continue to connect in all the ways that are possible to us right now. Most of all, we need to continue to point the people of the world to Jesus, who told his much loved followers: “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Trust in God and trust in me also” (John 14:1).

If you are feeling anxious or fearful about the current situation, I want to encourage you to lay your burdens at Jesus’ feet and to share that anxiousness with him. If you want prayers for you or with you, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

We have hope, as Christians, that God is actively working to restore all things to Himself and that one day soon, the earth will be filled with His glory and all tears will be wiped away (Habakkuk 2:14, Revelation 21:4). It’s our responsibility and privilege to share this hope with the world and comfort their hearts in times of trouble.

“But for you who obey me, my saving power will rise on you like the sun and bring healing like the sun’s rays. You will be as free and happy as calves let out of a stall.” – Malachi 4:2, GNT

Let’s pray for our communities, our country, and for the world, that God will bring healing, peace, and restoration to our lives, if it is His will and that this incredibly strange situation might provide opportunity to impact hearts for good,

for His glory and His kingdom.

Finally, "Have courage, and be kind..." | Cinderella

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

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.