

Women + The Church

There is a great deal of evidence of women's participation in the early church and the role they played in early Christianity.

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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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

Walking With God

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“He has told you, O human, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” | Micah 6:8 NAS 1977

Knowing And Being Known

At the heart of us all is a deep desire to be known; to be so intimately connected with another person that it's as if we are no longer two people but one – *‘a single soul dwelling in two bodies.’* There are many of us who are lucky enough to experience that kind of affinity with another person; sharing empathy, support and kinship in a close human relationship like no other. Our experience of marriage, that of committing to another person and them to us, is one of the most intimate and fulfilling relationships we will have in this life.

Yet nothing will compare to knowing and being known by the One who has breathed life into us, animating our flesh and bone and *‘in whom we have our very being.’*

God intended that humanity would seek Him, reach out for him and desire to be close to Him in relationship. He is not far from each one of us, as near as the tongue in our mouth, as close as the heart in our chest. (Acts 17:28, Romans 10:8)

In moments of quiet worship, in stirring songs of devotion, in times of disappointment, heartache and despair, the emotions that overwhelm our hearts all serve to propel us towards

seeking and loving the One who rings our hearts like a bell.
(Abraham Heschel)

Our days are numbered, yet we were made to walk with God. Perhaps we all feel that pull and longing, in the secret places of our hearts, to return to the place in the beginning, to the cool shade of the garden, where God once walked with us.

A Perfect Eden

In that garden, in the beginning, Adam and Eve were in close relationship with their Creator. The world that existed at that time was 'very good', a perfect Eden where God's glory shone softly between the tall, slim trees and Heaven and Earth were as one. In the middle of the garden, grew two trees; the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. From one tree Adam and Eve could freely eat, but the other was forbidden to them, prohibited from being eaten and not even to be touched. Life, and life abundantly, flowed from one and certain death would be the result of eating from the other.

It was such a small thing, only one bite, and yet the result of their disobedience was catastrophic. The evil of sin entered God's good world, and would eventually spread like a dark, cancerous mass across the surface of the earth.

A [sentence of death](#) was passed, not just to Adam and Eve, but to all who would come after them. The way to the garden – to the place where God had once walked with them – was barred. The oneness with God that had existed before sin entered the world had been broken and a great chasm now lay between the Creator and His children.

A Communion Of The Heart

This expression, "*walking with God*" is used often in the Bible and means, '*not merely God's knowledge of a person, but also a*

person's response to God. Practical obedience, along with a communion of heart and will, are described as "walking with" or "before God." (Genesis 5:22; Genesis 6:9; Genesis 17:1; Psalm 56:13; Psalm 116:9)' (Elliot's Commentary)

The first person that we're told *'walked with God'* after the catastrophe that unfolded in the garden was a man named Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24). Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, a famous chapter cataloguing many faithful individuals, tells us that Enoch was taken from this life and didn't experience death. The commendation of him was of "one who pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5). The word used for walk in the commentary on Enoch's life in Genesis means, in Hebrew *'to come, go, walk'*. It carries the idea of coming and going *with God* – that is, that Enoch was in complete union with God and agreement about where they were going together. He walked alongside God on a daily basis, going here and there in life but always at God's side.

This idea of 'being at God's side or being near to God' being related to faith is recognised by Paul the Apostle in his thoughts about Enoch (Hebrews 11:6). He verbalises what is surely a connection between the two ideas: *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:5-6, ESV). Walking with God, Paul seems to be making clear, is synonymous with a *'faith that pleases God'*.

"Can two walk together without agreeing where to go?" | Amos 3:3, BSB

"Will, then, God walk with a person, guiding, shielding, strengthening him, if that person is not in harmony with Him? He (Amos) illustrates the truths that all effects have causes, and that from the cause you can infer the effect. The "two" (here) are God's judgment and the prophet's word. These do not coincide by mere chance, no more than two persons pursue in

company the same end without previous agreement. The prophet announces God's judgment because God has commissioned him; the prophet is of one mind with God, therefore the Lord is with him, and confirms his words." (Elliot's Commentary)

An Invitation To Deeper Relationship

Abraham, called the friend of God (James 2:23), was summoned deeper into relationship by the invitation of God to 'walk with Him'

"I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless." | Genesis 17:1, NIV

Abraham is known not only as the *friend of God* but also as the *father of faith*, demonstrating the reality that 'walking with God' and the action of faith in our Christian lives is one and the same thing.

Faith is what brings us to that place of being 'put right with God' but it's [faith, meshed with action](#), that really brings us into a full relationship with Him. The all-encompassing meaning of belief is intrinsically linked with the actions that back it up – seamless believing and doing. It's not the doing that makes us right, but it's impossible to show our faith, without the doing.

The apostle James, in his letter to the believers, tells them that separating belief from action is like separating a body from the life force or spirit within – all that's left is a corpse. (James 2:18-26). As Eugene Peterson so aptly puts it, *"Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that; it is skill in living. For, what good is a truth if we don't know how to live it? What good is an intention if we can't sustain it?"*

It's faith, coupled with action – *believing and doing* – that elevated Abraham from being not just a *father of faith* but

also the *friend of God* – participant in a close and intimate relationship of knowing and being known.

The Psalmist also spoke of the comfort of knowing and being known – that God’s presence was always at his side.

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” | Psalm 23:4, NIV

‘Walking with God’ means simply that we are [God’s people](#). We are intimately known by Him and He is known by us. This is a relationship where God’s presence is truly living with us and we are walking alongside Him, each and every day of our lives.

A Promise Of Reconciliation

This has always been the comforting promise from God to His people (Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 10:12, 1 John 1:7), firstly to the nation of Israel and then flowing and expanding outward from Israel to include all of humanity in the [new covenant](#):

“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people.” | Leviticus 26:12, NLT

“I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” | Ezekiel 37:27, NLT

“For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” | 2 Corinthians 6:16, ESV

Jesus was the exact representation of God and the very imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11), the Word-made-flesh who took up residence amongst us (John 1:1-14).

By knowing him, we could truly know God and the promise of reconciliation could be seen clearly for the first time; so close we could reach out and touch it. The morning of that resurrection, it was as if all the world waited, in breathless anticipation, for the moment when restored relationship became a reality and we could once again walk with God.

Through the blood of Jesus, the painful separation between us and the One who loves us best, has been healed. The ravine of sin has been bridged and we who were once far off from God, are brought close again, in perfect, harmonious relationship.

A Life Alongside God

Walking with God is sometimes equated to simply '*living a moral life*', but I believe this misses the point.

Firstly, there's nothing simple about living a perfect, moral life. And while the Christian life is certainly about *trying* to do the right thing, we will actually never achieve a morally acceptable life. Only Jesus achieved that and it's only through his victory that we are conquerors, but certainly not through our own efforts. *Walking with God* isn't about achieving perfection, not at the core of it all.

Walking with God is about a life spent *alongside God* and, as a result of that choice, producing the kind of faith that is real and pleasing to God. It's about relationship; a decision of the heart to choose the way that God is walking, not our own, and to pursue that path with Him.

This is a faith that isn't just a thought or a hope or a list of unemotive 'do's' or 'don'ts' but forward motion in real communion with God, as a Father and as a Friend. "Walking with God" is deeply connected to the idea of having *living faith* – that is, faith expressed through action, not merely subscribing to a set of beliefs. It's living in the delicately balanced tension between faith and works and ensuring that the

things we're convicted of find real demonstration in our conduct.

Corinthians confirms that walking with God is by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7) but this is faith demonstrated not just in *saying* what we believe but *doing* what we say we believe.

It isn't an intellectual exercise – *knowing things about God* – but a choice of the heart, intimately *knowing God*, His character, His will, His greatness and majesty, and then choosing humbly to walk alongside Him every moment of our lives. We'll get it wrong more often than we'll get it right, but we have faith that 'the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin' and we have confidence that his sacrifice enables us to draw close to God and choose relationship again with Him. This is where conviction and conduct meet in glorious union and we are truly 'walking with God'.

"We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true." | Dallas Willard (1935 – 2013)

"It's possible for a man to spend so much mental energy in discussing and rediscussing the simple element of truth that he never puts what has learned into practical effect, and this is probably why some people have drawn a fictitious distinction between matters of morality and what have been called 'mere questions of doctrine'. Sound doctrine is the foundation of sound morality and right action is simply right doctrine in practice. By putting on the whole armour of God, we must have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Our shoes are in use every step of the way. We are not always using the sword of the Spirit to the throwing down of fleshly strongholds; but we are always walking, whether in war or peace, whether surrounded by the wicked and assailed by fiery darts, or in the assembly of the saints and hearing

words of cheer. Our 'walk in life' covers all this experience." | Islip Collyer, Conviction and Conduct (page 97, 106)

On Earth As In Heaven

Awareness of and responding to the love of God is at the heart of our Christian lives. We are who we are, first and foremost, because of God revealed in Christ. Because of Jesus, sin has been defeated and death no longer has the final word. "There's nothing more to separate us from the promise, the words of a living hope." (This, My Soul | The Gray Havens)

The truth is that *'walking with God'*, that beautiful, expansive, all-enveloping phrase, is what draws us back into the light, where we can stand naked and unashamed in the glow of God's glory. Choosing to walk with God, in a repaired relationship through Jesus, returns us to that garden, to the place where everything was *'very good'* and where every heartbeat of our life echos to the will and glory of our Creator.

"How great the chasm that lay between us, how high the mountain I could not climb. In desperation, I turned to heaven and spoke Your name into the night. Then through the darkness, Your loving-kindness tore through the shadows of my soul. The work is finished, the end is written, Jesus Christ, my living hope." | Jesus Christ, My Living Hope, Bethel Music

Two worship songs, in particular, were the inspiration behind this article. The first, *'Your Glory'* by All Sons & Daughters, is a beautiful reminder of the purpose for which we were created and to which we're all called. The second, *'This My Soul'* by The Gray Havens is a compelling retelling of the

story in the beginning: the perfect peace of Eden, disrupted by sin, but promised rescue, redemption, and restoration, at great personal cost, by the Creator Himself.

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.

Jesus: King Of The World

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 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. The royal line, although still in existence, no longer occupies the throne. Israel is a shadow of her former glory; a vassal state under the domination of the Persians, the great world power of the day. Ezekiel's prophecy against Israel – a result of their rebellion of God's sovereignty and their faithlessness as His witnesses – has been utterly effective:

"You profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax. This is what

the Sovereign Lord says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! The crown will not be restored until he to whom it rightfully belongs shall come; to him I will give it.” | Ezekiel 21: 25-27, NIV

Demoralised and disloyal, the people of Israel continued to go about their religious obligations but they had completely lost faith in God and doubted His love for them. They believed that nothing good ever came from following God and forgot, as they had many times before, His blessings and favour of them as a people. They had no confidence He even cared about their future.

This final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of those who had been specially chosen by God as His witnesses to the nations around them. Even with the perspective of their glorious history and events like the Great Exodus from Egypt, they had completely given in to apathy. They had neglected God's promises; and spiritual lethargy and a corrupt priesthood spread unfaithfulness, cancer-like, throughout the nation.

Malachi's words are the last message from God to His people and, for 400 years after, there will be silence.

God's Announcement – I Am Arriving!

It is to this vast length of silence that God finally speaks, announcing His impending arrival into the story of not just Israel, but the entire world. The work that God had been at for a long time was about to culminate in a tiny, obscure town in the middle of the demoralised and now Roman-occupied nation of Israel. The glory of God was about to be revealed to all humanity.

John the Baptist, God's messenger, bursts onto the scene,

“preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). But there was more.

“As he preached he said, “The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptising you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.” | Mark 1:7-8, MSG

John was simply the messenger. The ‘star in this drama’ was none other than God’s own son, Jesus Christ. He was coming, not only to save people from their sins but to be God’s perfect image-bearer and to restore God’s righteous rulership. Jesus had been prophesied to be king of the world ([Luke 1:30-33](#), [Matthew 21:5](#), [John 12:13](#), [Luke 19:38](#)) and his message of good news would totally change people’s lives.

God’s Kingdom And The Arrival Of The King

We were created intentionally and with purpose, to be the image-bearers of God, the king of the earth. We were destined to be like Him and enact His will throughout the world. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were given the authority and privilege of ruling over God’s good creation, filling all the earth with His glory and accomplishing His purpose. This is where we first see the concept of God’s reign – His sovereignty – displayed (Genesis 1:26).

However, instead of partnering with God, Adam and Eve sought to undertake this rule on their own terms, setting in motion the destructive cycle the world has been subject to ever since. The story of human history is really the story of human failure in accomplishing God’s purpose, and God’s continual involvement in the chaos and mess that we have created, to save us from ourselves.

For centuries, God’s story of liberation and redemption – part

of His 'Kingdom Mission' – has been enacted, over and over again in the history of the world. Firstly, with covenants made to [Abraham](#), through whom God promises to bless all the world (Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 13:14-17, Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 17:1-11). Then with Abraham's descendants, those who came to be known as the people of Israel, who were intended to be God's witnesses to His Kingdom Mission.

"But you are my witnesses, O Israel!" says the LORD. "You are my servant. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other God – there never has been, and there never will be. Yes I am the LORD, and there is no other Saviour." | [Isaiah 43:10-4, NLT](#)

Finally, God personally steps into the drama in the person of His Son; [born as a human like us](#), yet expressing and embodying the entire fullness of God's nature (Matthew 21:37, Matthew 1:22-23, Isaiah 7:14, John 1:14, John 14:9, John 12:45, Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 2:9). The relationship between humanity and God, broken in the Garden of Eden, was going to be reconciled. God's good creation, damaged by Adam and Eve's disobedience, was going to be restored. Not only that – God's Kingdom Mission – that all the earth be filled with His glory – was finally breaking through into the kingdoms of mankind. It had been advancing for centuries but finally, it had arrived and the message was clear. God was still king – He has always been king – and His reign, fractured early on in human history (Genesis 2), was going to be properly reinstated through His Son, Jesus.

"From the days of John the Baptist until the present, the kingdom from heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been attacking it." | Matthew 11:12, ISV

"The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" | Mark 1:15, NLT

God's Upside-Down Kingdom

The idea of 'the kingdom of God' was consistent with the Jewish hope of a saviour and the arrival of the one who would be the 'consolation of Israel'. (Isaiah 52:7-9, Luke 2:25, Acts 26:6). The prophet Isaiah speaks poetically about the one who would bring peace, justice, and righteousness again to Israel. This national hero would be from David's royal line and Isaiah predicted that his kingdom would have no end.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone...for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." | Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV

"And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." | Isaiah 11:12, NASB

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." | Micah 5:2, NIV

"Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" | John 4:42, NIV

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” | [Luke 1:30-33, ESV](#)

Yet God's kingdom was not going to arrive in the way that the nation of Israel expected. In reality, this kingdom had very little to do with Israel's nationalistic hopes of liberation from the Romans. This messianic saviour was also intended to be the saviour of the world and the righteous king of God's choosing. Israel was correct to expect him to be from David's royal family line but pitifully ignorant to think that he would only be coming to overthrow the Romans and restore Israel's monarchy.

So while the nation of Israel expected a royalist and a revolutionary, one who would come to conquer and overthrow by violence and force, their saviour arrives instead in the humblest of forms, a small baby, born to an insignificant family. As this child grows into a man, he teaches of a kingdom of service and love, not of domination or force. This kingdom is about repentance and return to the one true king of the world. This kingdom will deliver humans from the worst kind of domination; slavery to sin and death, and bring them back to a whole and restored relationship with God.

This is not what the nation of Israel expected and even Jesus' disciples, his closest companions who knew him best, were dismayed and confused by his arrest, trial, and subsequent death, not fully understanding his purpose and mission:

“And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in

these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened." | Luke 24:17-21

The Kingdom Of The King

Jesus came as the perfect example of what God is like. [The Word became a man](#), like us, that we might truly know and appreciate the depth of God's reconciling work on our behalf. In the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, all families of the earth, of any nationality, are able to be blessed and experience the righteous rulership of God.

Jesus was born to be king and He is God's perfect king. He upholds the requirements of God's righteous laws and enacts justice on behalf of his people. His power is not demonstrated in ruthless coercion, but in love, poured out on the cross. His might is not revealed in political coups and military advances, but by redeeming humanity and transforming our hearts.

"We need to shed our unearthly and nonsocial and idealistic and romantic and uber-spiritual visions of kingdom and get back to what Jesus meant. By kingdom, Jesus means: God's Dream Society on earth, spreading out from the land of Israel to encompass the whole world." | Scot McKnight

As more people come to believe in Jesus and the power of his message, surrendering to his rulership in their lives, God's kingdom grows and develops, until one day it will fill the whole earth. One day, the relationship between humanity and

God will be totally restored, [the earth will be completely filled with God's family](#) and the last great enemy, even death itself, will be destroyed ([1 Corinthians 15:25-26](#)).

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever." | Daniel 2:44, NASB

This is a kingdom that has been advancing for thousands of years. It is the core message of the gospel, which confirms to us God's purpose with humanity and how God's Kingdom Mission can become our story too. And the king of this kingdom is none other than Jesus Christ, born to be king of the world!

"Hail, the prince of heaven comes, angel choirs sound the call, for this babe wrapped in a cloth is the incarnate word of God. All the kingdom and its power, resting now in this child, prince of heaven, Jesus: hope of the world." | [Prince of Heaven](#)

"Something happens when people tell the story of Jesus and start living like he really is the king of the world. That's when this gospel becomes the best news that you've ever heard." | [The Bible Project](#)

The kingdom is also described in the Bible in other ways, such as 'the kingdom of heaven' (the gospel of Matthew), 'the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1:11), 'the kingdom of Christ and God' (Ephesians 5:5) and 'the kingdom of God' (the gospels of Mark and Luke). You can read more about the kingdom in the article '[The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet](#)'. You may also enjoy [this podcast](#), produced

Only A Suitable Redeemer Will Do

One of the most startling pieces of information that we are given in relation to Jesus is the fact that he was **made like us**. Jesus' redemptive work *on behalf of humanity* was deeply connected to *his own humanity*. Although he was born "[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. He understood humans because **he was** human.

"For this reason he (Jesus) had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." – Hebrews 2:17, NIV

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." – Hebrews 4:15, NIV

These remarkable concepts of atonement, redeeming and redemption were subtly foreshadowed many times throughout Old Testament stories; one such example is the well known tale of Joseph of the multi-coloured coat and his descent into slavery at the hands of his brothers.

However, the law of *the kinsman* or *the kinsmen redeemer* had been written into the weave of Israeli life from very early times, clearly foretelling what Jesus' work was to be and how it was to be accomplished. We find the narrative of **the redeemer and the redeemed** poignantly depicted in the [story of Ruth](#)

A Story Of Redemptive Love

The [story of Ruth](#), the inconsequential outsider, is one of joy and heartbreak, desolation and hope. Ruth, of all people, was an unlikely heroine. Not only was she a woman, in a time when women were of minor importance, she was also a widow, poor and foreign and would have been considered an outsider to any true-born Israelite. Yet the conclusion of this seemingly insignificant tale brings us to the interesting discovery that Ruth eventually became an incredibly significant and vital part of [God's plan of salvation](#) for the world – she was an ancestor of [Jesus Christ](#).

Ruth's story powerfully underscores the importance of love's redeeming power to transform lives. (You can read more about it [here](#).)

Yet hidden within the narrative lies a deeper significance; a story within a story, that has remarkable bearing on the work and purpose of Jesus himself. Hidden, in plain sight, is the way in which God intended to save the world, through His Son.

'The Nearest Kinsman Redeemer'

The book of Ruth is set during the time of Israel's history known as 'the Judges' (circa 1220 – 1050 B.C.). It was a period of religious and moral decline, frequent foreign oppression and national disunity. The people of Israel were often at the mercy of enemies from without and discord from within. Yet although it was a time of great instability, certain laws and customs helped to form an integral part of

Israelite society. Many of these laws can still be found throughout the Old Testament, in the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

One law, in particular, was known as the law of the *nearest kinsman* or the *kinsmen redeemer*. The kinsman-redeemer was a **male relative** who, according to various laws of the [Pentateuch](#), was responsible to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need. The Hebrew term for kinsman-redeemer (*go el*) designates *one who delivers or rescues*, either property or person. **The redeemer had to be related to the person being redeemed and could not be a stranger.**

The *kinsman-redeemer* or *guardian-redeemer* was the proper legal term for the nearest male kinsman who was able to redeem or vindicate a relative (Leviticus 25:25-55).

*“If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his **nearest redeemer** shall come and **redeem** what his brother has sold.” – Leviticus 25:25, ESV*

*“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and **perform the duty of a husband’s brother** to her. – Deuteronomy 25:5, ESV*

*“If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger’s clan, then after he is sold he may be **redeemed**. One of his brothers may **redeem him**, or his uncle or his cousin may **redeem him**, or a close relative from his clan may **redeem him**.” – Leviticus 25:47-49, ESV*

While these laws may seem strange and somewhat archaic to us

in the 21st century, they were instituted to protect the impoverished or marginalised members of society who might otherwise suffer permanent loss of life, freedom or property.

The Law Cannot Redeem

Ruth appealed to a wealthy landowner and relative of her mother-in-law, named Boaz, who was eligible to undertake the rights and responsibilities of the *nearest kinsman*. Boaz immediately tells Ruth he is willing to redeem her, however there was a kinsman nearer than himself. If this kinsman could not, or would not, then Boaz promises Ruth he will certainly redeem her.

“And now do not be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you request, since all my fellow townspeople know that you are a woman of noble character. Yes, it is true that I am a kinsman-redeemer, but there is a redeemer nearer than I. Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, good. Let him redeem you. But if he does not want to redeem you, as surely as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie here until morning.” – Ruth 3:11-13, BSB

Boaz’s conversation with the nearer kinsman soon makes it clear that this kinsman cannot redeem Ruth. He offers Boaz this right of redemption, which Boaz accepts.

“Take my right of redemption, because I cannot redeem it...At this, Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I am buying from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, to raise up the name of the deceased through his inheritance, so that his name will not disappear from among his brothers or from the gate of his home. You are witnesses today..” – Ruth 4:6, 9, BSB

The nearer kinsman in this narrative represents the Law of Moses, under which Israel was governed. Instituted soon after the Israelites had migrated from Egypt, an event also known as 'The Exodus', this law remained in place until Jesus' time and still forms a central part of [Judaism](#) today. Yet, while the Law came first, prior to Jesus, and imposed many values of morality and justice, ultimately it could never put a man or a woman right with God. ***It was unable to redeem.***

"The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent His own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins." – Romans 8:3, NLT

No amount of doing good or attempts at obedience can remove the stain of sin from a person's life. All believers must come to understand that obeying God's laws cannot produce the righteousness needed for salvation. It is only [dependence on God](#), in faith, to put things right, that makes it possible to be '[right with God](#)'.

The law was only a shadow of better things to come; acting as a guardian until all humanity could come to understand their need of a Saviour.

Jesus' Humanity Was Crucial To Redemption

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, [the devil](#)." – Hebrews 2:14, NIV

Only a human could break the power of sin and death which had gripped humanity in a stranglehold for over 4000 years. Only the **kinsman-redeemer** could redeem.

Yet no ordinary human could possibly have achieved this remarkable feat. God, in His infinite love, did not leave anything to chance, causing His Son to be born, with the mind and character of Himself, the exact representation of His being and radiant with His glory (Hebrew 1:3), yet flesh and blood like us. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus became *Emmanuel*, “*God-With-Us*”, strengthened in will and purpose and redeemer of the world.

Only A Suitable Redeemer Will Do

Jesus was human and ‘our brother’ in every way, made like this so He could be a suitable redeemer.

He fulfilled the essential requirements of being made ‘like his brethren’, human in every respect necessary, so that he could conquer sin and death for all those who shared in his same humanity.

Only in this way, being completely mortal and subject to pain and death, could it be said of Jesus that “*he must suffer and that, by being the **first to rise from the dead**, he would proclaim light both to [the Jews] and to the Gentiles*”, thereby giving the rest of humanity hope of also escaping the finality of mortality and death.