

Three Reasons I Don't Believe In Hell

Before beginning, I would like to acknowledge that discussing this particular topic may appear to be controversial and that you, the reader, may not share the views I express. This article is not intended to be offensive or divisive in nature, but rather to open a channel of respectful conversation about a subject that is deeply important to many people.

I have chosen some time ago to abandon a rigid position on issues or topics which are non-essential to the gospel, from which there is no possible room to move or breathe, and allow my questions and convictions to sit in tension with one another while my Christian life continues to grow and deepen.

What this means, in practical terms, is that I'm genuinely interested to hear from you, that I welcome engagement and even difference on many biblical subjects, including this one, and, while I express this to be my currently held position on this topic, I would hope I am still open to learning new things as scripture speaks to me and as I hear from others.

The following thoughts are expressed in that light:

The subject of *hell* has popped up in a few different conversations recently, and, while I tend to try to avoid speaking from a position of a negative ('*what I don't believe...*'), this doctrine is one that's never rung true for me.

I genuinely doubt the validity of the doctrine of hell or that it's an actual teaching of scripture. For many Christians, a requirement to believe in hell has been a deal breaker in their faith and, I think, for good reason. It's hard to reconcile the many elements of this doctrine with the picture the Bible paints of a good, good God.

In this article, I'd like to share three compelling reasons why I think the doctrine of hell doesn't biblically add up and why I think it's actually in opposition to the truth of the gospel narrative.

But Firstly, What Do I Mean By *Hell*?

Well, I'm referring to the (assumed to be) biblical teaching about the destination of the soul at the moment of death; either to heaven if you've 'done okay' or, alternatively, to hell, if you 'haven't quite measured up'. *Saints* go up. *Sinners* go down.

The parameters for 'not quite measuring up' can differ greatly depending on who you might be talking to. Some would say that *anyone* who hasn't [received Jesus as Lord and Saviour](#) is outside God's salvation. Therefore, either by ignorance or purposed willfulness, they have rejected God and earned themselves a one-way ticket to hell.

This includes, for example, people living deep within the Amazon jungle (who have had limited contact with the outside world and may never have heard the Christian message of Jesus Christ), those who may have been Christian once but have turned their back on Christ, those who have heard the message of Jesus but decided *no thanks*, as well as those who have engaged in various horrors such as rape, torture and mass murder during their lifetime.

Others are more uncomfortable with the thought of Adolf Hitler rubbing shoulders with good and sincere people (who, while they might not have been Christian, could hardly be described as having lived a 'wicked life'). Or those who, through no fault of their own, had never even heard of hell, let alone Jesus. It does seem a little heavy-handed a response towards people who were essentially clueless about the rules but were punished anyway. Hell, they therefore conclude, is only for the truly wicked; surely [God makes concessions for nice](#)

[people?](#).

The traditional teaching of hell is that it's a place of both psychological and physical torment; an 'eternal lake of fire' where the wicked are perpetually burned for all eternity (decide for yourself who qualifies). This imagery was further elaborated on during medieval times by the artists who graphically displayed vile creatures eating flesh and devouring sinners in the place of torment. (These images, together with fragmented texts of the Scriptures, and the circulation of [apocryphal](#) books, led the medieval church into some strange and grotesque doctrines).

The period of history known as The Great Awakening (1730-1740) placed particular emphasis, as a method of conversion, on the horror that awaited the unrepentant sinner. Jonathan Edwards, a famous American congregational preacher of the time, described hell as a place where "God holds men over the flames in the way that one holds a loathsome spider over a candle. He speculated on how it would feel to have the searing agony of a burn drawn out through eternity. He told listeners that the ground beneath their feet was a rotten flooring over a blazing pit, ready to give way in seconds." (Bruce Shelley, Church History In Plain Language)

What Does Scripture Teach?

Psychologists today would no doubt have a field day with the profoundly damaging psychosocial and spiritual effects of this kind of preaching, dubbed 'fire-and-brimstone', but, more particularly, what does the Bible preach? Is this kind of reality really found in scripture?

Here are three reasons why I don't think scripture teaches this at all:

1. Hell Doesn't Fit The Gospel Narrative

One of the amazing aspects of the Bible is the consistency of

its message and theme, from start to finish. It's remarkable, given the reality of its varying authorships and the different time periods during which it was written, that the major theme of God's sovereignty, rule, and purpose remains intact. In fact, affirming God's sovereignty throughout the biblical record gives shape and purpose to the role for which humanity was created.

[The gospel narrative](#) is one that tells the story of Jesus, God's only Son, and announces that he is both Lord and King. In him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose (Acts 2:36, Romans 8:19-21).

But what is He saving people from?

The first book in the Bible, Genesis, tells us something important about our own history, and it sets the stage for the drama that subsequently unfolds throughout the rest of [God's story](#).

It tells us, firstly, that we were created with purpose, designed to be like God, to image Him throughout His good world and rule wisely and well on His behalf (Genesis 1:26).

Secondly, it tells us that instead of partnering with God in this purpose, we chose our own will, introducing the evil of sin into God's good world. The terrible consequence for the first humans, Adam and Eve, is that they were banished from the garden and from God's presence. Furthermore, humans became 'dying creatures', subject to disease, aging, and mortality. Dying became hard-coded into our DNA.

"You will sweat all your life to earn a living; you were made out of soil, and you will once again turn into soil." | Genesis 3:19, CEV

"Adam sinned, and that sin brought death into the world. Now

everyone has sinned, and so everyone must die.” | Romans 5:19, CEV

We are subject to mortality. Death is our great enemy; this is the consequence of disobedience, passed on Adam and Eve and received by all those who came after them.

“So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone.” | Romans 5:18

The gospel narrative tells of humanity hopelessly enslaved to sin and at the mercy of mortality (Romans 6:15-23). Far from the spiritual life God intended for us, we're incapable of saving ourselves or of overcoming death (Acts 4:12). The gospel, however, offers good news! : rescue, redemption and eternal life – God's own life, by the simple act of [giving allegiance](#) to His Son, Jesus, as Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9-10).

The gospel confirms the biblical reality of a just but loving God who is for His creation, who is not willing that any should perish, and who has actively worked to reconcile and transform us so that we can live the life of purpose for which He created us (2 Peter 3:8-10, John 3:16).

Hell – further punishment after death – simply doesn't fit the gospel narrative.

2. Hell Doesn't Fit The Character Of God

God is the God of promise, at whose Word the universe came into being and whose Word will never return to Him void, not accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent ([Genesis 1:3](#), [Isaiah 55:11](#)). His loving devotion endures forever. He is faithful, true, just, and all glorious ([Psalm 136:3](#), [1 Timothy 1:17](#)).

The Psalmist declares the wonder and worthiness of this Eternal God, who is clothed in light, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, and who walks on the waves of the sea ([Psalm 104:2](#), [Job 9:8](#)). All of creation bows in obeisance to His majesty, for all things, owe their existence to Him ([Psalm 104:30](#), [Psalm 6:4](#), [Psalm 96:11](#), [Luke 19:40](#)).

God proclaimed both His Name and character to Moses, the great deliver of Israel [during the Exodus](#), stating:

“The Lord – the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.” | Exodus 34:5-9, ESV

The Psalmist also writes often and extensively about the innate goodness of God:

“For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” | Psalm 100:5, ESV

“The LORD is good and upright; therefore He shows sinners the way.” Psalm 25:8, CSB

“The LORD is good to all; His compassion rests on all He has made.” | Psalm 145:9, BSB

There’s a lot to unpack in all those verses. Yet perhaps the overwhelming take-home point is this: God is just. He’s not vindictive or biased and He [doesn’t show favoritism based on our social status, gender, or nationality](#). In fact, He is generous-hearted and gracious, even to those who are His enemies.

Jesus demonstrates this in His famous sermon on the mount, where he sets out the characteristics of those who would be children of the kingdom. He shows that choosing to behave in this way is simply imitating the characteristics of their Heavenly Father:

“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” | Matthew 5:45-48, CSB

This aspect of God’s graciousness – His undeserved love and favour to humanity – permeates every aspect of the gospel narrative, giving it weight and power. Because He is just, He wouldn’t overlook the sin of the world. But because He is also gracious and good, God sent His Son into the world, to suffer under the hands of wicked men, so that humanity could be rescued from the curse of sin and death (Matthew 16:21, Isaiah 53:4-6). In His goodness and in His justice, He made arrangement for sin to be absorbed and absolved, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God is not a vindictive sadist. It simply doesn’t fit the character of a good and gracious God to punish people by “holding them, like a loathsome spider, over a flame for all eternity.” I would have serious concerns about other aspects of God’s character if I truly believed He is capable of sustaining such indefinite torture, even to those I might consider deserving of such a fate.

Interestingly, during the time when kings ruled the nation of Israel (926BCE – 586BCE), Israel engaged in the practice of child sacrifice by fire to the pagan god Molech, a practice they had absorbed from the nations they had previously conquered. God considered this to be a great evil; it was completely abhorrent to Him and something which he had expressly forbidden (2 Chronicles 33:6, Jeremiah 32:35, 2 Kings 21:6).

The doctrine of hell, in its many terrifying forms, perhaps tells us more about the capability and cruelty of human imagination than the reality of what occurs at death.

Hell – as a place of fiery, eternal torture for the wicked – simply doesn't fit the character of God.

3. Hell Isn't Found In The Bible

Well, it is. But not in the way you think.

While the word *hell* is certainly found in some of our English translations, it's usually a translation of the original Hebrew word *she'ol* (שְׁאוֹל), and on the remaining occasions, three other Greek words (*hades* (αἴθ' ἄδης), *gehenna* (γε'εννα) and *tartarus* (ταρταρο'ω).

It's translated by the King James version as *hell* 54 times, however more accurate translations like the NASB or NIV show the word *hell* only occurring between 13–14 times, all of which are found in the New Testament. The Hebrew word *she'ol* is translated in other places as 'grave' and 'the pit' and the more accurate translations tend to translate it in this way ([Genesis 37:35](#), [1 Kings 2:6](#), [Job 17:16](#), [Isaiah 14:11](#), Ecclesiastes 9:10)

The English word *hell*, comes from 'helan', meaning 'to conceal'. It conveyed no thought of heat or torment but simply of a 'covered over or concealed place.' In the old English dialect, the expression "helling potatoes" meant, not to roast

them, but simply to place the potatoes in the ground or in a cellar (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged).

Here's a brief overview of the original words:

She'ol

She'ol was understood, by Jewish writers, as a place of stillness and darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and the unrighteous, regardless of the moral choices made in life. In *she'ol*, one is cut off from life and from God.

"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun" | Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, ESV

"Humans and animals come to the same end—humans die, animals die. We all breathe the same air. So there's really no advantage in being human. None. Everything's smoke. We all end up in the same place—we all came from dust, we all end up as dust." | Ecclesiastes 3:19–20, The Message

She'ol is used throughout the Old Testament and is derived from a word meaning *hollow*, the place under the earth where all previously living things rest in eternal, silent repose, without knowledge, consciousness, or reward.

"Since she'ol in the Old Testament times referred simply to the abode of the dead and suggested no moral distinctions, the word 'hell,' as understood today, is not a happy translation." – Collier's Encyclopedia (1986, Vol 12, p.28)

Hades

In the [Septuagint](#) (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and throughout the New Testament, the translators used the Greek word **hades** (ᾍδης) in place of the Hebrew word *she'ol*, translating with the Jewish concepts of *she'ol* in mind – a place where there is no activity – rather than the mythology of Greek concepts. This can be shown to be the case as they expressly use *hades* as an equivalent for *she'ol*, both in the Greek translation and also where they are quoting passages from the Old Testament (Hebrew text). One example appears below comparing [Psalm 16:10](#) with [Acts 2:27](#) (where the former is being quoted by Peter the Apostle):

“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” – [Psalm 16:10, ESV](#)

“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.” – [Acts 2:27, ESV](#)

With one exception, mentioned further below, the word *hades*, in all appearances in the New Testament has little, if any, connection to afterlife rewards or punishments.

The best equivalent understanding, which most modern translations use is *‘the grave’*. The context of the verses in which this word is used support the Jewish understanding of *she'ol* as a place of silence and inactivity to which all those who die are consigned.

The exception, as noted above, is Luke’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), in which the rich man finds himself, after death, in *hades*, and “in anguish in this flame”, while in contrast the angels take Lazarus to “the bosom of Abraham”, described as a state of comfort.

A parable is a type of analogy – a succinct, didactic story written in prose or verse, designed to illustrate one or more

instructive lessons or principles, and is never intended to be interpreted literally. Additionally, it would be problematic for an entire theology to be built around one specifically non-literal section of scripture; or even from several parables put together. *“Parables should never be used as sources of doctrine, but rather we take doctrine as a norm for interpreting the parables”* (Tertullian).

This passage, in my opinion, therefore shouldn't be considered to be literally describing aspects of an afterlife, including hell: that is, a place of eternal fiery torment *because this is not what scripture teaches elsewhere* Nevertheless, it is certainly an fascinating passage, intended to illustrate some lesson or principle and therefore requires an interpretation of some sort.

Gehenna

Another Greek word that has been translated as *hell* in some translations is 'Gehenna'. It appears twelve times in the New Testament and is actually a Greek compound, derived from the Hebrew words *ge* and *hinnom* or the “valley of Hinnom”; a proper name which literally means valley of the son of Hinnom. Gehenna is actually the word that Jesus uses in the New Testament and [you can read more about what Jesus really said about heaven and hell here](#).

The valley of Hinnom is a deep narrow slice of earth just outside the city of Jerusalem. Also called Tophet, or 'the valley of dead bones', it already had a long and disturbing history by Jesus' time. Firstly, as mentioned earlier in this article, in the early days of Israel's kingdom, it was the place of idolatry and child sacrifice, by burning alive with fire to the pagan god Molech (2 Kings 23:10).

Later it was used as a place where rubbish, filth, and the carcasses of beast and men alike were disposed of. Fires were kept constantly burning to consume the valley's refuse and to

prevent contamination. In the days of Jesus, the highest mark of ignominy that could be inflicted upon a person was a criminal's burial in the fires of Gehenna.

Gehenna is a literal place of perpetual burning; *but it was in Israel, not in a subterranean underworld*. Therefore Jesus' meaning when warning of Gehenna was quite different to what might be understood by *hell* today. The theological implication of Jesus' words is likely this: that the consequences of unrepented sin in our life will lead to the finality of death and, by inference, the complete and utter annihilation of existence.

Just as the fire of Gehenna burned indefinitely, completely obliterating any trace of whatever was cast into it, so is our existence in death, without the salvation that is to be found in Jesus. Extinction of not just of our physical body, but of our life, our soul, our spirit, the very thing that makes us *us*. *All of us*.

Again, the theological implications point to the need for and provision of [a saviour, the hope of the world](#); the very core of the gospel narrative.

The translation of Gehenna to *hell* is actually a mistranslation. More correctly, it should have been transliterated into English (ie it should read 'Gehenna' on every occasion) and left in its proper form for the reader to interpret.

Tartarus

Used in 2 Peter 2:4, this Greek word actually occurs nowhere else in scripture.

"For if God did not spare messengers having sinned, but having cast [them] down to Tartarus with chains of deepest gloom, delivered [them], having been reserved to judgment..." 2 Peter 2:4, LSV

Tartarus was considered in Greek mythology to be the great abyss, situated far below *hades* (the grave). Together with the context of this verse, the use of this word suggests a particular and specific meaning. Some kind of *imprisonment* is implied, certainly, but no sense at all of fiery torment or torture. In fact, the verse suggests that judgment (of who and what kind isn't stated) is still yet to come.

Certainly, there are questions raised by these passages – the parable of Lazarus for example. What does it mean? What lesson are we intended to take from it?

And what is Peter referring to in his letter? Who are the messengers He refers to? What was their crime? And why is this Greek word found here, yet used nowhere else in scripture?

It's not my intention to discuss these at any length in this particular article, only to comment that I don't believe these single instances are compelling enough evidence for the doctrine of hell, particularly when compared alongside all of scripture as discussed earlier in this article.

Again, as with Gehenna, *Tartarus* should have been transliterated into English and left in its proper form for the reader to interpret.

What I've Concluded

While scripture certainly has much to say about what happens *after life* and why, it's a markedly different story than perhaps we've been led to believe.

Scripture tells us that we're all bound by mortality, a one-way, downhill journey from cradle to grave, where life – all aspects of *living* – cease. This situation is permanent and final (Genesis 3:19, 2 Samuel 14:14, Psalm 103:15-16, Romans 5:12, Romans 8:20-28).

Death is not just the enemy of life itself, but also thwarts

the purpose for which humanity was created. Even the noblest of men or women soon pass from the world's stage, their personalities and achievements more often than not fading from memory. *"No wisdom of man or rebellion can deliver new life out of death."*

But the perfect human was promised to come, one who would bear the sin of the world and who would wage war against sin and death in his own body (John 1:29). Through his perfect life, his willing sacrifice, his dishonorable and painful death, and his glorious resurrection, all of humanity were promised that rescue would come and that death would be overturned. Jesus was going to build his church and not even the *gates of the grave* would prevail against it (Romans 8:3, Matthew 16:18).

"He [God] has revealed this grace through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the gospel" | 2 Timothy 1:10, BSB

The gospel narrative is the story of God, in Jesus, saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose. Those who believe in Jesus will live, even if they die, for Jesus promises that he is not just the light and life of humanity but the resurrection itself (John 11:25, John 3:16).

The traditional doctrine of hell finds no place in this narrative, nor does it fit the character of a good and gracious God, nor can it actually be found in scripture.

Instead, the final pages of the Bible close with the great conclusion promised as part of Jesus's reign, once He has put all His enemies under His feet, that the last enemy to be destroyed will be death itself (1 Corinthians 15:26): *"Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their*

eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more because the previous things have passed away.”
(Revelation 21:3-4, CSB)

“The angel showed me a river that was crystal clear, and its waters gave life. The river came from the throne where God and the Lamb were seated. Then it flowed down the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the river are trees that grow a different kind of fruit each month of the year. The fruit gives life, and the leaves are used as medicine to heal the nations.

God’s curse will no longer be on the people of that city. He and the Lamb will be seated there on their thrones, and its people will worship God and will see Him face to face. God’s name will be written on the foreheads of the people. Never again will night appear, and no one who lives there will ever need a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule forever.” ([Revelation 22:1-5, CEV](#))

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.

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, infact, 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.