

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.

New Beginnings

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

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

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

The Gospel Initiative

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

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

No one who came before Jesus was able to live a perfect life. Then Jesus arrived on the scene, a new kind of human, who fulfilled God's law and lived the perfect life as God's ideal image bearer. He willingly gave himself on behalf of the world as [a perfect sacrifice for sin](#). He died on the cross for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2) and was raised to life again three days later in a glorious new beginning (John 20:16-18). He was the first of many whom God promises will be just like him, if they confess Jesus as Lord and saviour (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). By [being baptised](#) "into Jesus", a person becomes a new kind of human – "a new creation"- and a whole new life begins.

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

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

But, as with new year's resolutions, new beginnings have a way of losing their gloss and the excitement and determination can

begin to fade. The Christian life is full of ups and downs and we can lose our passion, become discouraged, or forget the reasons why we even chose this life to begin with.

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

The Story Of Ruth

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

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

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

But God loves a good plot twist. When we think things are

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

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

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

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

The Story Of Nehemiah

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

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

Pressures from without, burnout from within, unreasonable expectations, and fear of failure. Many Christians feel all these emotions and challenges, probably many times, at different stages in their Christian life. As with the people in Nehemiah's time, Christians need to be reminded of their purpose and reinvigorated with a sense of mission!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The New Covenant

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

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

"Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a

better covenant.” | Hebrews 7:22, NIV

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” – Hebrews 9:14-15 | NIV

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

Amen!

This article was first published 13 January 2020

An Easter Tale

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Let me tell you a tale.

It starts in a garden, long, long ago.

And what a garden it was – literally, a paradise on earth. A place of grandeur and beauty, filled with trees of every

description and with leaves in every shade of green, soaring upwards toward a sky so blue it hurts the eyes.

The sound of a great river can be heard flowing through this garden paradise, a source of life and refreshing for all the living things that call it home. In the still shade of the trees, quiet pools of deep emerald green can be found, surrounded by rocks and ferns. If you listen carefully, you can hear the sound of animals scuttering through the brush, and, overheard, birds sing joyfully in the trees, lifting a chorus of praise to the One who created them.

A perfect garden; beautiful, unspoiled, glorious.

If the tale had ended here, it would be a short one, perhaps, but satisfying nonetheless.

But this is not the end of the story.

Come a little closer, deeper into the heart of the garden and you will see two trees, shimmering softly in the golden sunlight. Laden with ripe, juicy fruit, they're the most beautiful trees you've ever seen. You watch as a woman, standing underneath the long, slender boughs, reaches out her hand and plucks a piece of fruit from one. She passes it to the man standing beside her. Reaching out again, she takes another and, as they both bite into the fruit, you see movement in the branches as the sinuous form of a serpent winds itself up and away into the leaves of the tree.

Juice trickles down their chins and drips onto their bare feet. You long to join them, sharing in the delicious fruit and in a moment that seems bathed in the golden light of pleasure and contentment.

Yet, you suddenly sense a change in the air. You can see that the two humans can feel it too. Their expressions change and the sudden heaviness you feel is reflected in the set of their shoulders. Emotions chase across their faces. Discovery,

understanding, disappointment, shame...

You hear a voice. A question. Even watching from a distance, you feel the need to hide, to shrink, and turn your face away in discomfort.

"What have you done?"

You listen closely as the conversation unfolds.

A punishment; life ending in death.

A promise; death ending in life.

The conversation concludes with words spoken with great love but also great sadness *"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.*

And now, you must leave."

A sharp metallic scent fills the air, new and unexpected in this place. You turn your gaze and see that a lamb has been slaughtered, its blood soaking into the ground. A mournful cry passes through your body, rising up towards heaven, and, with a deep heaviness, you realise that all of creation is echoing your cry, a keening filled with pain and loss.

Something terrible has happened in this garden. A darkness is falling in Eden. A great evil has entered paradise and Death close on its heels.

The two humans move eastward, clothed in the skin of the lamb, and then pass beyond the borders of the garden, out into wildlands they've never seen before. A flaming sword is placed at the entrance to the garden, turning every which way so that it appears to form a fiery cross. Shimmering creatures stand on either side of the sword, guarding the way back to what lies at the heart of the garden; the abundant and eternal life of God.

This is a tragedy too great to bear, a terrible price to pay, and yet you cannot look away. What did the voice mean, life springing from death? Is all lost? Surely there is still hope?

Centuries pass. The darkness only grows deeper and heavier.

The whole world lies under the power of the evil one and the heart of humanity has become hardened and sick. A long silence, nearly 400 years, has passed since anyone has heard even the voice of God. Hope seems lost.

But this is not the end of the story.

Under a star-sprinkled sky in a small middle-eastern town, shepherds are out in the fields watching over their flocks. It's census time and the town is filled to overflowing with travellers from all over the nation. The fields are the quietest place to be right now, and the shepherds are welcoming the reprieve from the thronging crowds.

Suddenly a great light appears all around them, illuminating the fields for miles in every direction. A voice speaks aloud. *"Good news of great joy for all people! Your saviour is born!"*

Salvation! Hope! The shepherds know what these words mean. The words of the promise have been passed down, in hallowed whispers, through every generation since the beginning of time itself. One day, the saviour will come. One day, the way back to the garden will be opened again. One day we will go home.

The life and light of humanity was appearing, at long last. Light was piercing the thick gloom, shining in the darkness and now they knew the truth and a promise realised, that the darkness will not overcome.

But when? And how?

The ruler of this world has a foothold in every corner and many are enslaved to his bidding. The child must be kept safe, hidden in plain sight in a small, non-descript town, thought

to be of little worth, until the time is right. Not even his own family would know the truth of who he is. Not yet.

Seasons come and go. The moon waxes and wanes. Time passes.

The child is now a man, fully grown, and full of grace and truth. One day soon he will wage war against the kingdoms of this world; one by one they will fall at his feet and he will stand victorious, the triumphant conqueror and saviour of humanity.

And, even now, you think that the moment must surely have arrived. You find yourself standing in another garden, known as "the oil press", due, most likely, to the presence of the young olive trees growing in abundance all around. The ground is rocky under your feet and the moon bright overhead.

A small band of men lie asleep and, as you come closer, you see that the man is a little way off from the sleeping men, kneeling down with his hands clasped in prayer.

You can sense the great weight and desperate solitude that lies upon him; sorrow is clearly etched across his features and, as you watch, great drops of sweat fall from his brow, soaking into the ground like blood.

The sound of footfalls and the murmur of voices can suddenly be heard floating on the still night air. A crowd of men draws close, some who look to be perhaps priests of the city, others of more humble occupation, all carrying swords and clubs. The man and his friends, now roused from sleep, stand waiting.

The leader of the crowd steps forward and kisses the man's cheek in greeting and, all at once, the rest of the crowd moves forward, as one, to seize the man, a signal having clearly been given.

Chaos erupts, a sword swings wildly and a man screams, clutching at the bleeding side of his head where moments

before his ear had been. Then, suddenly, his ear miraculously reappears, reattached and healed, and the crowd falls away astonished and afraid. You can hear the man sternly reprimanding the one in whose hand the sword is found.

"Put your sword away, for all who take the sword will die by the sword."

You are confused and suddenly afraid. This is not how you expected this to go. You want to run away and, turning your gaze, you see that the small band of followers that had come with the man have done just that.

He is left alone, surrounded by a crowd who are at once afraid of him but also enraged by him. Their hate for him is palpable, and envy and violence are thick in the air.

They step forward again in sudden decision; the man is seized, unresisting, his hands are bound, and, as he is led away to be tried, you want to weep. All those years of obscurity and safety, all the hope of the world resting in this man, and even he was no match for the dark evil in the world.

You hope for a miracle but you have seen what men can do.

The sun finally rises, illuminating a terrible sight. The man is struggling up a hill, the weight of a timber crossbeam pressing down on his bruised shoulders and back. He has been viciously beaten and his back is covered in deep welts, A rough circle of small, gnarly branches, fashioned to resemble a crown, has been jammed upon his head. The sharp barbs of the thorns cut deeply into his flesh, blood dripping down his neck and onto the wood of the crossbeam across his shoulders.

At the summit, the man is unceremoniously stripped naked, his arms are forced apart, bound to either side of the timber crossbeam, and heavy, iron nails are hammered through his wrists and into the timber.

The crossbeam is raised high above the gathering crowd, the man sucking in shuddering breaths with each jostle, and attached to a large, upright post already fixed in place. The post, stained with darkened streaks, tells the terrible history of this place, and, as the man's ankles are hammered to the upright, fresh blood flows, joining the old.

You want to turn away, you cannot bear to look any longer on the horror and humiliation, but you cannot. It seems as if the whole world's gaze must surely be turned towards this sight, forced to give witness to the deprivation and evil endured by this man.

You can taste misery and guilt, like sawdust in your mouth and feel a terrible clawing in the pit of your stomach.

At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the man dies. The crowd, who came at first for sport, are now deeply shaken by what they have seen, and return to their homes full of sorrow and contrition. A Roman centurion standing nearby raises his voice, surely in protest of what has taken place. "*This*", he exclaims, "*was an innocent man.*" You, too, lift your voice in agreement but it is lost on the wind.

Yes. A perfect human, good and true, and all the hope of the world rested in him. An innocent man but also now a dead man.

There is nothing more that can be done.

The man's body is taken down from the cross, wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a newly cut tomb; he is the first to rest in this place. A stone is rolled across the entrance and the long-hoped-for saviour of the world is left alone, in the still darkness of the grave.

But this is not the end of the story.

A soft breeze is blowing as the first streaks of dawn creep over the distant horizon. A bird sings sweetly from a branch

overhead and the grass is cool under your feet as you wander through this peaceful place.

You are in yet another garden and, as you draw closer, you realise you are near to the place where the man's body had been laid. You can hear voices, the low, intimate conversation of a man and a woman, and, as the path rounds a corner, you see them standing together beneath the trees, close but not touching. The woman has been crying, you can see her cheeks are wet with tears, but, strangely, her eyes are shining not with sorrow but instead with joy.

She turns suddenly and brushes past you, breaking into a run and is quickly lost to sight. Only the man remains.

And now you can his face clearly and you draw in a sharp breath, hope suddenly fluttering inside your chest; it cannot be!

For you saw this man betrayed, beaten, brutally executed, buried...not three days past. You saw the light of the world, condemned and put to death and yet here he stands before you, alive.

Radiant. Restored. Resurrected.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega" he says, his voice warm with feeling, "the beginning and the end. The one who is and who was and who is to come. Fear not.

I am the first and the last. I died and, behold, I am alive forever."

He smiles and now a sob catches in your throat.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet will they live. I have swallowed up death in glorious victory and all those in me will be made alive too, an abundant and eternal life.

Do you believe?"

You nod, scarcely daring to trust what your heart knows to be true. The curse *has* been overcome, the promise *has* been fulfilled. *"Life to death, death to life, like seeds, like soil, like stars."**

"In this world, you will have trouble" the man continues *"but take heart! I have overcome the world."*

It was prophesied that I, the Christ, should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in my name to all nations, beginning in this place.

And now, dear heart, go, and tell the world the good news.

I am risen!"

Genesis 3:19, 1 John 5:19, Malachi 1:1, Luke 2:10, John 1:14, Luke 22:44, Mark 15:25, John 20: 18, Revelation 1:17, Revelation 22:12, John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:22, John 16:33, Luke 24: 44-46, Matthew 28:19-20

*quote by author Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019)

This article was first published 14 April 2022

Will Progressive Christianity Destroy The Church?

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I want to talk about something that's been on my mind for a while. Some time ago, I watched a commentary by a 'Christian pastor' that totally shocked me. In fact, I haven't really stopped thinking about it since.

I found it disturbing; equal parts ridiculous and horrifying, and I really couldn't believe it was being presented under the guise of legitimate Christianity.

For me, it highlighted a disturbing and, frankly, heartbreaking direction that modern Christianity, or at least a part of it, has taken; a wild trip sideways down the labyrinth-like rabbit hole of progressive Christianity*. And I believe this pervasive ideology, left unchecked, could signal the death knell of the church as we know it.

Here's the commentary and then I'll get to discussing it (this video has been removed from YouTube since the writing of this article, only the transcript is available, which is below):

"There's a part of the gospel where Jesus uses a racial slur [for context, the story of the syrophenician woman in Mark 7 and specifically Mark 7:24–30]...what's amazing about this account is that the woman doesn't back down, she speaks truth to power. Her boldness and bravery to speak truth to power actually changes Jesus' mind. Jesus repents of his racism and extends healing to this woman's daughter. I love this story because it's a reminder that Jesus is human. He had prejudices and bias and, when confronted with it, he was willing to do his work..." | [Brandan Robertson](#)

Brandan Robertson, poster boy for the progressive Christian movement, is, by his own declaration, 'spreading the good word of an inclusive, modern gospel'. Progressive Christianity, part of a larger movement called "the emerging church", claims that at the heart of this movement is the desire to articulate a way of being Christian that is an alternative to the traditional Christian faith portrayed in the public realm.

Brandan is a “noted author, pastor, activist, and public theologian working at the intersections of spirituality, sexuality, and social renewal” (taken directly from his website). He currently serves as the Lead Pastor of Metanoia Church, a “digital progressive faith community”. In July 2021, *Rolling Stone* magazine included Robertson in its annual “[Hot List](#)” of top artists, creatives, and influencers who “are giving us reason to be excited about the future.”

Well, I, for one, am not excited in the least.

There’s a lot to unpack in his words and, to be honest, it’s hard to know where to start. The problem with progressive Christianity is that it is, by nature, slippery and hard to pin down at a glance; it comes so prettily packaged and cleverly articulated.

Words like inclusivity, deconstruction, equality, and truth-seeking are marched out in quick succession and used in such a way so as to sound noble but humble, and demonstrative of authentic faith.

Issues such as social justice or economic disparity and the marginalisation and discrimination of certain social or ethnic groups are highlighted and cited as key issues for which the progressive Christian will boldly campaign.

While these kinds of issues are certainly addressed within the biblical texts, they do not stand alone from the sound theology or biblical context in which they sit.

And this is one of the core issues with progressive Christianity; seemingly meritable values are affirmed and offered up as convincing proofs of a reshaped and reimagined 21st-century gospel, but, the reality is, they’ve been cleverly detached from the context or theological truth in which we find them in scripture.

For example, progressive Christianity **affirms the right of**

women to choose what happens to their bodies**. Initially, we might chorus a resounding yes; surely this is speaking to the unarguable value we place on free will and the intrinsic liberty of every human to choose their own destiny...until we realise this is really another way of supporting the legalisation of abortion, in any circumstances and for any means.

Progressive Christianity offers the statement that **Christianity is the truth for us. But it is not the only truth. We share our lives with people who are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist. We experience these people as loving and caring by following their religious traditions. We believe there are many trains [to God] and God welcomes them all***.

Again, we may begin to agree. Many religions affirm values in which we see merit (such as love and care for others)...but this is not what is really being said. This is really another way of advocating the post-modern ideology that there is more than one truth, that, in fact, there are many truths, different from each other but all true nonetheless. Critically, this statement asserts that Jesus is not the only way to God and that *being a good person* – “loving and caring” [of others] – will do the job just as well.

Not only that, personal experience is given primary authority in determining truth. Instead of the Word shaping the conclusions we draw from our experiences – *sola Scriptura*, our experiences become the primary authority in determining truth, requiring the Word of God to conform to and find agreement with our own conclusions and experiences.

Our experiences certainly form part of a raft of resources that provide value in decision-making or conclusion-drawing, but only when the conclusions we draw or the decisions we make are first and foremost shaped by the sound theology expressed in God’s Word and in light of the truths expressed therein. Our experiences are not to be considered reliable in and of

themselves; scripture warns us that the heart of humanity is deceitful above all things and that our way of viewing the world is shaped by a mind that defaults to our own self will and not the will of God.

The conclusion expressed in the statement that **because we experience people as loving and caring therefore their expression of religion [without the need for Jesus] is still an acceptable path to God** is in direct contradiction to what scripture teaches. *Sola Scriptura*, therefore, demands that this conclusion must be reworked and submitted under scripture; reason, logic, tradition, and experience are valid but subordinate to what God's Word teaches.

Dig a little deeper and you begin to see that progressive Christianity has an agenda, one that claims to be supported by biblical truth but is, in reality, a radical reappraisal and, often, rejection of traditional Christianity in favour of what is largely a human rights agenda.

The words employed and issues raised are used in ways that are deceiving, that relegate Jesus to simply a remarkable helper, spiritual teacher or life guru, that advocate for the inherent divinity in humanity, and that change the meaning of the gospel and its call on believers' lives entirely.

The primacy of personal experience, as expressed by progressive Christianity, propounds the idea that *our truth is true* and therefore cannot be argued against but must be accepted as valid, irrespective of God's Word saying differently.

Progressive Christianity teaches that you can find God within yourself, that sexuality and gender are fluid, that morality is relative, and that the primary call of Christian faith is to "love God, love our neighbour, and love ourselves", which is simply a clever reworking of Jesus' words in order to redefine 'love of neighbour' as including "affirmation of the

LGBTQ+ community...”

“The significance of the word ‘progressive’ in a sociological sense is rather deceptive in that it misrepresents and downplays the very gospel the church exists to proclaim. It implies and claims that the traditional Christian faith has served its purpose, it is now old-fashioned, restrictive, irrelevant and even repressive.” | Rev E.A. Curnow

“At its core, progressive Christianity is a different religion. It gives you a different God and a different Jesus. It’s not a Jesus who can save you.” | Alisa Childers

I want to analyse some of the ideas inferred in Brandan Robertson’s commentary, who, by the way, states that he “cannot know if Jesus was the incarnation of God with any degree of certainty“, and who “sometimes, believes in the divine claims Christians have projected back onto the historical Jesus and sometimes doesn’t.“

1. Jesus Was A Racist

I’m appalled even typing that sentence. However, it has been said so it must be countered.

Racism is defined as *prejudice against or antagonism towards a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalised*. However, throughout the Bible, God makes no distinction between people based on their social status ([Jeremiah 22:3](#)), their ethnicity ([Acts 10: 34-35](#)), or their gender ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

He sends rain on the just and the unjust and causes the sun to rise on the good and the evil (Matthew 5:45). His message of good news, first preached to Abraham, was intended to be a blessing for all humanity (Genesis 12:3). The whole world is separated from God by sin and His salvation through the

sending His Son is for the whole world to receive, if they will (Romans 5:12, Ephesians 2:12, 2 Peter 3:9).

God is just, holy, perfect, generous, impartial, and good. If this is who God is, then this is also who Jesus, God-With-Us, is. Jesus was no racist.

2. Speaking Truth To Power

While the woman mentioned in this story 'spoke truth' and while Jesus certainly was 'power', the use of this phrase is intended to convey something else entirely. The idea behind the phrase *speaking truth to power* is that of an individual courageously confronting (possibly corrupt) authority, calling out injustices, and demanding change. It presumes that the one speaking is the true moral authority in the matter, someone who is willing to proclaim 'what is right' in the face of criticism or consequence.

Again, if we've seen Jesus then we've seen God and any display of power sits alongside absolute morality, justice and truth. Jesus himself *is* truth (John 14:6) and the use of this phrase here to imply he manifests injustice or untruth is plainly ridiculous.

3. Jesus Was Willing To Do His Work

This phrase *willing to do his (or her) work* is another favourite in progressive circles and is used to imply there is some character deficit or lack in an individual (in this case, Jesus), which needs adjusting or repenting of (a word which Brandon also employs in his commentary regarding Jesus).

Jesus was certainly prepared and "willing to do his work", but it wasn't the work of self-improvement or repentance.

The Lamb, without spot or blemish, sent into the world to reconcile the world again to God, his work was to do the will of his Father (Luke 2:49, John 5:36). Though he entered into our human experience and is, therefore, able to understand us

in every way, right down to the alluring call of sin and the temptation to choose self will that we experience, his life and character were perfect. It could not have been otherwise, else our forgiveness and reconciliation could not have been obtained (Hebrews 9:14, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22).

This is just a poor attempt to reinvent Jesus into a caricature that serves the cultural slogans and trends that the progressive Christian movement wants to advance, and which bear no resemblance to the real Jesus of the scriptures; perfect lord, saviour, king.

4. Brandan Robertson's Conclusion: 'A Reminder That Jesus Is Human'

It's sad but unsurprising that this is Brandan's take-home point from this story. In reality, the story in Mark 7 marks a significant turning point in Jesus' ministry of kingdom-preaching and repentance-calling, where the mission is expanded to include the Gentiles; obviously super good news for you, me, and anyone else of non-Jewish heritage!

The world that we see in the Bible and all around us still is one where all of creation, including humanity, groans to be set free from the bondage of sin. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus, who is both saviour and king, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

The story of Mark 7 is about the inclusive call of the gospel, the invitation extended to all to come out of the dominion of darkness, ruled over by the prince of this world, and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, a kingdom of light and life. A call to *come as you are...but not stay as you are*; a challenge to surrender, to receive forgiveness and renewal, and to be transformed into the kind of human God always intended you to be (John 5:24, Acts 26:18, Luke 24:47, Colossians 1:13).

Will Progressive Christianity Destroy The Church?

“Progressives are not just a group of Christians who are changing their minds on social issues and politics...they often deny core essential doctrines of the faith, which leads them to preach an entirely different gospel.” | Alisa Childers

Despite the descriptor, I don't believe progressive Christianity to be Christian at all. The movement often denies key tenets of the Christian faith; the primary authority of the Bible as God's inspired Word, the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus, the dark reality of sin and the resultant separation it creates between God and humanity, and the need for Jesus' atoning sacrifice as a means of reconciliation with God.

Sin itself is often redefined, simply becoming *“all of our greedy impulses that create inequity in the world”* (Brandan Robertson), rather the biblical definition of rebellion against God's law, *“a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God”* (Augustine of Hippo) (1 John 3:4), *“evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and sorcery; hatred, discord, jealousy, and rage; rivalries, divisions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, false testimony and slander and the like.”*

The truly dangerous reality is that the insidious ideology of progressive Christianity is infiltrating and hijacking genuine Christianity, silencing the church's ability to speak into and about the real-life situations for which she exists.

We are becoming less comfortable about naming sin and preaching the need for true biblical repentance and more concerned about being labelled as intolerant, judgmental, old-fashioned, or irrelevant. When did morality become simply

degrees of relativity and we became afraid to speak up and say, "*that is wrong*", or conversely, "*this is right*"?

We are becoming confused by cries of inclusivity, tolerance, and *love of the other*; mistaking the inclusive call of the gospel for the exclusive reality of the church.

We are uneasy repeating the biblical truth that "*narrow is the way and few there be that find it*", preferring instead the idea that multiple superhighways of every description will surely lead to God. The discovery of our *true, inner self* through spiritual evolution seems a more palatable message for the masses than the sombre alternative; the biblical narrative of *death to self* and radical rebirth in Jesus.

Despite her flaws, the church still needs to be the voice, the hands, the beating heart of Jesus in a dark and sin-enslaved world. We need to speak with sensitivity and compassion, yes, but we ought not to shy away from talking about the things people may not want to hear about but desperately need to; sin, estrangement, sacrifice, surrender, death, reorientation, transformation. We need to speak about these things too, with boldness and conviction.

Will progressive Christianity be the death of the church? No, I don't think so. I think the blood of Jesus, by which his church was purchased, is more powerful than that.

But I do think the church is facing one of her greatest challenges yet; not through external persecution as in times past, but through subtle, internal perversion. There is a desperate need for discernment and a deep commitment to the gospel of the Bible, in doctrine and practice.

I think we need to pay attention, to have our wits about us, wary of those who may come in sheep's clothing, disguising themselves as servants of righteousness. We need to be unafraid to boldly and confidently lay their claims and teachings alongside the sound words of Jesus Christ, the

living Word of God, for scrutiny and assessment, acceptance or rejection.

And I think we need to courageously recommit to our commission that, collectively, we, the church, the 'woman of valour' for whom Jesus died, will shine brightly in a darkened and impoverished world through our most basic and guiding principle: that is, to incarnate Christ.

"But test everything; hold fast what is good." | 1 Thessalonians 5:21, BSB

* <https://www.bethelbeaverton.org/progressive-christianity>, <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Christianity

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/05/progressive-christians-abortion-jes-kast/590293/>

John Writes A Letter

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

"God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day – our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life – fear of death, fear of judgment – is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love – love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He

loved us first. If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both." – 1 John 4:17-21, MSG

Authentic Christianity

Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.

John's words on this subject are blunt and straight to the point. *"You cannot be a Christian and hate other people"*. It's incompatible and hypocritical. Not only that, it's a blatant subversion of everything that is intrinsically bound up in a Christian's salvation by God's grace. We love God, because He **first** loved us and, despite our complete unworthiness, He sent His son to die for us. There is no greater love than a man dying for his friends, and there could be no greater demonstration of what love looks like, to die, even for those who were your enemies.

"What marvellous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it – we're called children of God!" – 1 John 3:1, MSG

Of all the people on this earth, it would seem obvious that Christians would understand the implications of this. We are the recipients of a love so deep and vast and completely undeserving, it should be impossible for us to not respond to this in our relationships with others. We haven't received from God what we should have. And what we shouldn't have received, we have. Grace, freely given, has been demonstrated by a love lavished on us in abundance. This recognition of grace should empower and transform us to demonstrate the same kind of love in all our relationships, and especially to our Christian family.

Grace is, perhaps, the easiest concept to speak about in the enthusiastic language of a born-again believer ([John 3:1-21](#)) but, in reality, the hardest virtue to assimilate into our Christian lives. Legalism, not grace, is one of the first lessons we learn in life; that all things come with a price and that nothing is given for free. We can tend to persist in this mentality after our conversion, even on an unconscious level, viewing God and each other in this light.

“The one who won’t practice righteous ways isn’t from God, neither is the one who won’t love a brother or sister.” – 1 John 3:10, MSG

Are We Really Born Again?

There’s a serious crisis amongst Christians. It seems we can talk a lot about love, but we’re actually woefully inadequate at demonstrating it. Instead of showing real, authentic love, demonstrated in graceful, multi-faceted ways, we see the opposite in many of our Christian communities. We’re often religiously wealthy but morally bankrupt; devoid of any real expression of a grace-led life. We say we’re born again but are we really? Has grace really touched our hearts?

Jesus told a story to illustrate what a life untransformed by grace looks like – that of the *ungrateful* servant ([Matthew 18:21-35](#)). Despite having been forgiven a massive debt of some several million dollars by his master, the servant proceeded to demand repayment of a debt owed to him by a fellow servant, of only a few dollars. When the fellow servant was unable to immediately repay, he had him thrown into prison, ‘until he could repay the debt’ – which would have been practically impossible from his prison cell. The master soon heard of the ungrateful servant’s behaviour and the conclusion of the tale is sobering:

“Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked

servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” [Matthew 18:32-35, ESV](#)

The parable was designed to impress upon the listeners the importance of their attitude towards each other in response to the forgiveness they had received from God. In fact, there is a direct connection between our professed love for God and our love for our ‘fellow servants’. John puts it this way:

“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” [1 John 4:20, NIV](#)

What Does Real Love Look Like?

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, ESV

These are all attributes of a life that is lived walking with God; [led by the Spirit](#). The implications of a Spirit-led life find their way into every aspect of our lives: affection for others, understanding and compassion for their failings, forgiveness of their mistakes (and our own!), confidence in God’s love and kindness, a commitment to cultivate close and loving relationships built on mutual respect and sacrifice.

These are attributes of a person who has fully grasped the

weight and implications of saving grace and whose life is being transformed, day by day, following the example of the One who went before – Jesus Christ. They are choosing every day to put aside the unfruitful works of darkness and to walk in the Spirit, producing the fruit that comes from living God's way (Galatians 5). The bright light of Christ makes their way plain.

Hate Will Destroy Us

The opposite of love is hate. And let's get real. Hate, in all its forms, whether displayed passively or aggressively, is like a poison that destroys our soul. It will ruin our life – and not just ours. It causes havoc in our families, our relationships, our churches and, critically, to our witness of the Gospel. We may think that we have never been guilty of 'hating our brother or sister', but when we harbour bitterness in our heart, when we gossip about them to others, when we withhold doing good on the basis of preference, when we are angry at them, when we don't treat them with dignity and honour, 'esteeming all better than ourselves', we are hating them.

So heinous is the position of hate before God that John says that a person who hates is said to be walking in darkness and not the light ([1 John 2:9, 11](#)). It's entirely possible for a person to continue professing religion but remain at enmity with their Christian brother or sister. The Bible states unapologetically that such a person is a liar ([1 John 4:20](#)).

They may fool everyone else but they cannot fool God.

Hate Is An Issue Of The Heart

We need to be on our guard in our Christian communities that we are not unwittingly or, worse, complicit in allowing lives to be ruled by hate, in all its insidious forms. While we may be vocal on what are perceived to be more serious sins (such

as murder or immorality), we tend to overlook or excuse things like slander, gossip, envy, enmity, strife, jealousy, bitter disagreements, divisions or backbiting. Do we speak against these things and model a better way? We are all capable of such things and we are all responsible for preventing the spiritual disease that results from overlooking these things in our Christian communities.

We are warned over and over in the Bible of how hatred and bitterness can destroy us. We are encouraged to love one another, keep short records of wrongs, and forgive others, not harbouring bitterness or anger in our hearts.

We know that all these issues find their source in the darkness of the human heart.

“For from within the hearts of people come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery.” – Mark 7:21, ESV

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. – Ephesians 4:31, ESV

When we struggle with issues like gossip, slander, bitterness, anger or envy, the problem lies inside us, deep in the recesses of our heart. The issue is not with the person at whom our hate is directed but with us. And if it were not a problem that all Christians face, the many writers of the epistles, especially John, wouldn't have taken the time to warn us of it.

If we can't love our Christian brother or sister, then, quite simply, we don't [understand grace](#).

How Can We Change The Narrative?

The imperative first step for anyone struggling with these issues is to spend some time considering God's grace and work

of salvation in their life. Make it personal. Consider what it meant for God to give His Son for you, that you might live. Consider the weight of your guilt and inability to fully satisfy God's righteousness, and comprehend the fact that, in Jesus, you are forgiven and set free, fully reconciled and made right with God.

Perhaps you don't truly believe this to be true for yourself and this is the root cause of your fear and judgment of others. Make it a priority to [find peace and true reconciliation](#) with the God who is for you and not against you. Allow the dark places of your heart to be flooded with the light of Jesus. Ask for God to soften your heart, for Him to remove the bitterness, envy and hate. Confess to Him how ashamed you are of allowing that root of bitterness to grow and ask Him to help you prune it from your life.

And, as Christian communities, we must all love enthusiastically, hating sin but loving the sinner, remembering that we were all at one time enemies of God. We must not tolerate those things that allow hate or division to flourish but show our faith by cultivating [works of the Spirit](#), against which there is no law! (Galatians 5:22-24).

“So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus.”
– 2 Peter 1:5-9, MSG

“Anyone who claims to be intimate with God, ought to live the kind of life that Jesus lived.” | 1 John 2:6, MSG

A Powerful Witness To The Truth Of Jesus Christ

Jesus tells his disciples in John 13:35, that by loving one another as he has loved them, all the world will know that they are his disciples. *The world will see your love for each other and know, without even having to ask, that you are followers of the King.* How we love, as Christians, therefore, is either a powerful witness to the truth and reality of the risen King and our allegiance to him; or a public denial of our belief in the King and his ability to truly transform our hearts. By not loving as the King loves, we demonstrate for all to see that the *ruler of this world* still controls us; that we are allowing this rule to flourish in our lives and govern our actions towards others.

Real faith in the King is more than the words we say, the emotions we feel, ideas we debate or a truth we believe. Real faith is something we do; expressed in visible ways, deeply rooted in and flowing from this focused centre; that “one man died for everyone.” Real faith shows up in our life – particularly in the way that we love the King’s people.

‘Sometimes called “the Proverbs of the New Testament”, the book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians exactly how to live so as to be compelling witnesses for the name of Jesus Christ. From perseverance to true faith to controlling one’s tongue, submitting to God’s will, and having patience, this book aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ.

Many have claimed that James and the Apostle Paul differed on the question of faith versus works, but in reality, the spiritual fruit that James talks about simply demonstrates the true faith of which Paul wrote.’ (taken from the introduction to James, ESV 2000). *If you claim to be a Christian, James says, **prove it by your actions.***

The kind of faith that is real, saving faith is shown to be vital, living and demonstrable in action. Depending on God and accepting His gift of grace – truly accepting it – will radically transform our lives. It will challenge everything we do, our belief systems and possibly even misplaced prejudices about others. It will compel us to behave justly to others, with impartiality, even though the world around us might not be just or impartial. It will compel us to do better and be better, not so that we ‘earn God’s favour’ but so that our faith can be seen as a reality, not just a matter of empty words.

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. Yet if our ‘loving union with God’ doesn’t result in a living faith, shown by our good works to others, then, as [1 John 4:7-21](#) says so eloquently, our love for God **simply isn’t real**. This kind of faith is a counterfeit Christianity and nothing more than a corpse.

This article was first published 10 February 2020

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