

A Christmas Gift for the Ages

Another Christmas is in the books. Christmas means many things to many people including family, friends, food, and gifts. All good, these are nevertheless secondary to the central meaning of Christmas.

The Gospel of John lacks a narrative of the birth of Jesus however it articulates the central meaning of Christmas in a very succinct way: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. And as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name* (John 1:1,14,12).

The Old Testament has accounts of God coming in human form to deliver his people (e.g., Genesis 18:1-33, Daniel 3:18-30). As John's Gospel reveals, when Jesus was born that first Christmas it was not another occasion of God coming *in human form* to temporarily deliver his people, it was God coming *as a human* to permanently deliver his people. God became like us to redeem, forgive, and adopt us (Galatians 4:4-5, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 9:11-14). God became like us to understand us, sympathize with us, and have compassion on us (Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-10, Romans 8:15-17). Above all, God became like us so we could become like him (2 Corinthians 3:8, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 3:2). Christmas is a time of giving but nothing can top the gift given at the first Christmas; *for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

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Recalibrating Our Moral Compass

Ethics are defined as the moral principles of an individual or group. As the moral compass, ethics determine concepts of right and wrong. Ethics stem from a person's worldview and so for Christians they should be shaped by the Bible.

In the Old Testament the moral compass for Israel was the Mosaic Law whereas in the New Testament for Christians it is the Gospel message. Interestingly, New Testament ethics do not replace Old Testament ethics, they fulfill them.

Woven throughout the Bible is the purpose, pattern, principle, and power for Christian ethics. The purpose is the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Everything we do, from smallest to biggest, should be done to the glory of God. In fact the Bible defines sin as anything falling short of glorifying God (Romans 3:23). The most noble of deeds, if not done to the glory of God is sin. The chief purpose of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The pattern for Christian ethics is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16-17, 11:1, Ephesians 4:17-24). The principle is love because God is love (1 John 4:7-21, Matthew 22:36-40). The power is the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 5:1-4, Galatians 5:22-25).

Scandal after scandal has rocked Christendom causing untold hurt to believers, and rightly leading unbelievers to mock and condemn. This seems symptomatic of our need as the Church to recalibrate our moral compass. Every decision and action should be preceded by these four questions: Will this glorify God? Is this consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus? Is this an expression of godly love? Is this empowered and led by the Spirit? Only then will God be glorified, and the world will know we are Christians by our love.

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All You Have

Jesus identified our highest calling as loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, strength and soul, and our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:29-31; Deuteronomy 10:12). That's fine, but what happens when our strength fails? What if the adversities of life are so overpowering we barely have the strength to carry out basic day to day tasks? What if health struggles, physical or mental, wear us down so much we don't even have the strength to get out of bed and face the day? How can we pour all our strength into others when there's no strength there?

The good news is this calling inherently understands our strength levels are highly variable. When you have lots of strength, *that* is what you are called to love with. When you have next to no strength, *that* is what you are called to love with. This is illustrated by the Biblical story of the widow who placed two small worthless coins into the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44). Although many donated fortunes, it was the widow Jesus marveled over. Comparatively, her giving exceeded all the others combined because what they gave was a fraction of what they had, however all she had, she gave.

The best news is that Jesus intimately understands our weaknesses and offers us the help we need to persevere (Hebrews 4:14-16; Matthew 12:20; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10; Romans 8:15-17; Philippians 4:6-7).

No matter where you find yourself in life at any moment, strong and on top of the world or weak and out of gas, if you can look deep into your heart and honestly say "all I have I gave", then you do love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul.

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Walking with Purpose

Walking programs are increasingly popular, walking with purpose pays great physical dividends. As beneficial as walking physically with purpose is, walking spiritually with purpose is infinitely more so.

When God entered into covenant with Abraham he said, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless and I will establish My covenant between Me and you" (Genesis 17:1-5). God called Abraham to conduct himself with the realization God was with him every moment of his life. When God called the nation of Israel into covenant he said "You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes by walking in them" (Leviticus 18:4). The way to obey God is not by lip service but through sincere conduct according to God's word. King Solomon recognizing this call to walk obediently was not harsh, but rather comes from a faithful and loving God, cried out "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart" (2 Chronicles 6:14).

Being a Christian does not eliminate the Old Testament calls to walk obediently before the Lord, it raises the bar. The Apostle Paul said "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Colossians 2:6-7; Ephesians 4:1, 5:6-15, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2). Walking in Christ is walking in love (Ephesians 5:1-2, 2 John 1:6) and requires walking by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Thankfully, as the Lord calls us to walk so too does he equip us, and when we walk accordingly the outcome is great joy (Colossians 1:9-12, Job 23:10-11).

Walking physically with purpose pays great physical dividends, walking spiritually with purpose pays greater eternal dividends.

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The Three Spheres of Sanctification

The Apostle Paul prayed “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Sanctification is the inner working of the Holy Spirit, progressively transforming believers into God’s image in Christ (1 Peter 1:1-9, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 4:3-7). Although sanctification is the inner working of the Spirit of God, we are called to work outwardly what God is working inwardly (Philippians 2:5-13, 2 Peter 1:1-11). To do this, it is helpful to understand *how* God works in us.

We can think of sanctification as occurring in three spheres. The first sphere of sanctification is godly sorrow producing repentance. As the Spirit sanctifies us, our desires drive us away from our former sinful lives (2 Corinthians 7:9-10, Acts 11:18, Romans 2:4, 2 Timothy 2:24-26). The second sphere of sanctification is godly desire producing godliness. As the Spirit sanctifies us, our desires drive us towards new lives of godliness (Galatians 5:16-25, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Colossians 3:1-4). The third sphere of sanctification is the recognition of personal insufficiency producing complete dependence on God. As the Spirit sanctifies us, humility helps us recognize our utter dependence on an utterly dependable God (John 16:33, Hebrews 4:15-16, Romans 8:37, Philippians 4:13), thereby driving us to walk by faith in Christ (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, 2 Corinthians 4:7, 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Concerning good works, God does not save us *because of* them but *for* them (Ephesians 2:1-10). When we walk in the three spheres of sanctification, we will increasingly walk in the good works God has prepared for us as the Holy Spirit increasingly transforms us into the image of God in Christ.

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Free Indeed

Jesus, coming to liberate us from bondage to sin promised “if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed” (John 8:31-36). Christians are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:1-7). The paradox is that although freed from slavery to sin, we still commit sins (1 John 1:9-10). No longer our master, sin nevertheless remains a powerful enemy. Even the Apostle Paul wrestled against sin in his life (Romans 7:14-24). Knowing he was not strong enough to win this war on his own, he rejoiced that Jesus had already clinched the victory (Romans 7:25).

We can draw wisdom from Paul for our own war against sin. The key is to fight anchored by faith in Christ (Romans 6:8-11), and in faith to fight with all we’ve got (Romans 6:12-19). Paul was never lulled into a false sense of security (1 Corinthians 10:12) because he set Jesus as his standard. This kept him humble and motivated. No matter how much he grew spiritually, he recognized his imperfections and room for growth (Philippians 3:7-16).

He exerted himself with extreme discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), humble in himself but confident in the Lord (Philippians 4:13), recognizing that it was the Lord who would make his efforts fruitful (Philippians 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 3:6). At times this battle rages fiercely, seemingly more than we can withstand, but at our weakest darkest moment we must remember the Lord is in control and he is faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13). Our sufferings are real but temporary (Romans 8:18), victory is sure in Christ and perfect peace, joy and rest await us (Revelation 21:1-4). Thus, the Bible encourages us to fight the good fight of faith and take hold of the eternal life to which we were called (1 Timothy 6:12).

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Abounding in the Work of the Lord

Psalm 46:10 says *“Be still and know that I am God.”* Psalm 46 assured Israel that God was their strength and refuge and an ever present help in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1). The Lord dwelt in their midst (Psalm 46:4,5,11) working mightily on their behalf (Psalm 46:6-9) and therefore they were called to relax and just let God be God (Psalm 46:10).

Magnificent as those old covenant promises are, Christians have a better covenant with better promises (Hebrews 7:22, 8:6, 12:24). Following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God no longer merely dwelt among and worked on behalf of his people, he now dwells and works within us (John 14:7-20; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22, 3:18; Romans 5:5, 15:13). Born again by the Holy Spirit, Christians live eternal lives of inseparable union with Christ (1 Peter 1:1-5; Titus 3:5; John 3:5-16, 10:27-29; Romans 8:28-39; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1-4).

With God dwelling and working within us we are able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond our wildest dreams (Ephesians 3:14-21, Philippians 4:13). Living in Christ we are blessed with new lives of good works prepared personally for us (Ephesians 2:4-10). We can outwardly work these works because God is inwardly working to give us the desire and ability (Philippians 2:12-13).

As Christians, God is still our refuge, strength, and ever present help in trouble but because he now dwells and works within us the call to *“Be still and know that I am God”* is lived out through the call to *“be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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Snakes and Scorpions

In *My My, Hey Hey* Neil Young sings “They give you this, but you pay for that.” This sometimes describes our prayer life, we ask for this but God gives us that. Fortunately Jesus resolves this paradox for us.

Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you ... For everyone who asks receives” (Luke 11:9-10). We do not however always receive what we ask for in spite of believing and asking in Jesus’ name (Mark 11:24, Matthew 21:22, John 14:13-14). God gives us this, but we ask for that making Jesus’ next statement more puzzling, “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?” (Luke 11:11-12). It seems like we pray for fish and eggs but get snakes and scorpions. We pray for healing but get sicker; we pray for financial relief but get unexpected bills.

The resolution lies in Jesus’ statement, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13, Romans 8:26-27). God knows infinitely better than us what we truly need and so the Holy Spirit quietly intercedes for us. God does not give us snakes and scorpions when we pray for fish and eggs, in reality he gives us fish and eggs when we unwittingly pray for snakes and scorpions. Often what seems beneficial to us would actually be harmful. Thankfully, instead of giving us the snakes and scorpions we ask for our heavenly Father gives us fish and eggs. Praise God for giving us this when we ask for that.

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He Leadeth Me

As Christians we have all sung the reassuring words; *“He leadeth me! He leadeth me! By His own hand He leadeth me.”* Although trusting God is leading us, paradoxically sometimes we don’t know where we are being led. For instance, God called Abraham saying *Go from your country to the land I will show you* (Genesis 12:1-3).

Like Abraham, we might not always know where the Lord is leading us but we can take comfort because God knows the plans he has for us (Jeremiah 29:11-13, Psalm 33:11, Isaiah 46:10-11). We will eventually reach God’s target destination if we fix our eyes upon Jesus because he is the good Shepard who leads us (Hebrews 12:2, Psalm 23, John 10:1-16). We do this by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, 16:7-15, 1 Corinthians 2:10-13) through choosing the faithful way and putting God’s ordinances before us (Psalm 119:30). Even when we are not sure where we are going, this will get us to the place God will show us because he is working all things together for good for those who love him (Romans 8:27-28). Ultimately the Holy Spirit will lead us in the way we need to go, and prevent us from taking wrong turns (Acts 11:12, 13:2-4, 16:6-7).

When you feel lost and unsure, remember Jesus’ promise to be with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). As Peter said, “though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:3-9). And with that in mind we can sing *“Whate’er I do, where’er I be, Still ’tis Christ’s hand that leadeth me”*.

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Saved To ...

Regarding Jesus the Bible says, *“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Accepting Jesus as Savior has always been a cornerstone of the Christian faith and rightly so since the Bible teaches that Jesus has saved us from our sin and the wrath of God (Romans 5:6-21). If this were the end of the story it would be an incredible story, but it is not, the Bible not only presents Jesus as *saving us from* but also as *saving us to*. Far too often it seems Christianity has focused on the *saved from* at the expense of the *saved to*. As great as the *from* is, the *to* is infinitely greater because the *from* is temporal whereas the *to* is eternal.

In Christ we have been saved *to* newness of life in this world (Romans 6:3-5, 12:1-2, 13:13-14, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:22-24, 5:8) and *to* an eternity of blessed paradise in the world to come (Revelation 21:1-7, 22:1-6). The sure link between what we have been *saved from* and what we have been *saved to* is the one who saved us. Our hope and security lies in the identity of the one who has saved us Isaiah makes clear, *“For the Lord is our judge, The Lord is our lawgiver, The Lord is our king; He will save us”* (Isaiah 33:22). As our judge, the Lord not only acquits us of our sin in Christ but he makes the acquittal permanent. This same Lord is the lawgiver so we know his judgment is righteous and binding. Finally, the Lord who saves is also the king of the universe and that secures for us what we have been saved *to*.

We must never forget what we have been saved from in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-9) but we must always live out what we have been saved to (Ephesians 2:10). As Paul writes, *“For as many as are the promises of God, in Christ they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us”* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

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Wait for the Lord

We lack in patience and have lost the art of waiting. We want what we want and we want it now. The Bible however presents waiting for the Lord as a key Christian discipline. For example, it encourages us to *“Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord”* (Psalm 27:14) because it promises us *“The Lord favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness”* (Psalm 147:11).

We need to remember the Lord is not limited by time like we are. As the Scripture says; *“with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day”* (2 Peter 3:8), and *“For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night”* (Psalm 90:4). This is why Peter could say *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness”* (2 Peter 3:9), and why through Habakkuk the Lord said *“For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay”* (Habakkuk 2:3).

When our patience for life begins to fray we need the reminder *“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised”* (Hebrews 10:35-36). Remember this promise, *“Yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary”* (Isaiah 40:31).

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Three Ways of Understanding

Proverbs 9:10 says *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”*. The call to know, understand, and believe the Lord and his word is woven throughout the Bible. Interestingly, it displays three ways of understanding God’s word; intellectual, spiritual, and experiential.

Intellectual understanding is foundational and comes from diligent Bible reading. Scripture exhorts us to persistently devote ourselves to reading God’s word. It needs to be assimilated into our hearts and heads (Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-25) thereby becoming a life guide (2 Timothy 3:10-17, Psalm 119:105, 130) so that we can conduct ourselves in a manner pleasing to the Lord (James 1:22-25, Joshua 1:7-9, Matthew 7:24-27).

Intellectual understanding, although indispensable, is not enough. Human ability to understand God’s word is limited (1 Corinthians 1:18-25, Acts 13:41, 2 Corinthians 4:3). There is a deeper spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:8-10) which only comes through the inner working of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1-16), the Spirit of understanding (Isaiah 11:2). Through this working of the Holy Spirit, the word of God comes to life with power to transform lives (Hebrews 4:12, Romans 1:16-17, 2 Corinthians 3:1-18).

Also built upon intellectual understanding, and parallel to spiritual understanding, is experiential understanding. There is a certain dimension to understanding God’s word that can only come through experience. The vital importance of experiential knowing is reflected by God’s dealing with the nation of Israel (Exodus 6:6-8, Isaiah 43:1-13). Paul was driven by the pursuit of experiential knowledge (Philippians 3:7-14), and it is what equips us to effectively minister to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

As we grow in these three ways of understanding, we will be transformed into the people God has called us to be (Romans 12:1-2).

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The Double Cure

Christmas season is here again making this the ideal time to reflect on a profound detail in the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus. To Joseph, the angel of the Lord said *“do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:20-21).

The last phrase is often equated with forgiveness of sins. Certainly forgiveness is integral to salvation, John the Baptist was called to *“go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins”* (Luke 1:76-77). The Bible repeatedly attributes forgiveness of sins to faith in Jesus (Acts 10:34-43, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:13-14).

Nevertheless, there is more to salvation than just forgiveness. Jesus saves His people from their sins because He completely delivers them from their sins. Our deliverance is not only from the penalty of sin (forgiveness) but also from the power of sin (sanctification). In Christ a person is no longer a slave to sin but has been freed to live a holy life (Romans 6:1-23). We not only receive eternal life (John 3:16, 1 Timothy 1:15-16), but also the power to walk in newness of life (Ephesians 5:8, Colossians 1:9-12, 2 Peter 1:4-9, 1 John 2:6)

This is the profound idea August Toplady expressed when he penned the words *“Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure, Save me from its guilt and power.”*

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Simplicity of Life

New Year's opens us to re-evaluating and refocusing our lives. Refocusing on core Biblical principles empowers navigating life's challenges. Paul had one goal, *"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead"* (Philippians 3:8-11). This established his life mission, *"one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:13-14).

We must continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2 Peter 3:17-18) yet there remains an underlying simplicity to the Christian life. At its core the Christian life is lived in Christ by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit out of faith, producing a life of faith working through love (Galatians 5:5-6).

Genuine faith is taking God fully at his word (Hebrews 11:1) so deeply that it profoundly shapes how we live (James 2:14-26). This is the only way to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Genuine love is selflessly doing what is best for another regardless of personal cost (Romans 5:1-11, John 3:16). Love reflects the very nature of God and is the only reliable evidence of genuine conversion (1 John 4:7-21). As we live lives of faith working through love we will fulfill our mandate to manifest the holiness of our Father in Heaven (1 Peter 1:13-23, Matthew 22:34-40) and that is the simplicity of the Christian life.

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The Presence of the Lord

Long ago God promised his presence; *“Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people”* (Leviticus 26:11-12). Jesus fulfilled this promise; *“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

The New Covenant promised God’s presence forever; *“I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people”* (Ezekiel 37:26-28).

This too is fulfilled in Christ (2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 8-10), through the church wherever it dwells: on Earth *“For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (2 Corinthians 6:16); in heaven *“For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them”* (Revelation 7:15); and in eternity *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them”* (Revelation 21:3). How different would our Christian lives be if we recognized we dwell in the presence of the Lord?

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A New Spiritual Creation

In his influential book from the early 1600's, *The Practice of Piety*, British Puritan Lewis Bayly wrote that by Jesus' *"resurrection from the dead, there is wrought a new spiritual creation of the world, without which all the sons of Adam had been turned to everlasting destruction, and all the works of the first creation had ministered no consolation to us."*

As Christians, failing to live the new life Christ inaugurated through the cross robs God of the glory due to him, our neighbors of the love due them, and ourselves of the blessings offered to us (Galatians 6:1-16). Paul said; *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are a new people (1 Peter 2:4-12) with new minds (Ephesians 4:17-24) and new knowledge (Colossians 3:9-11). We are members of a new covenant (Matthew 26:26-29), a better covenant (Hebrews 8:1-13), with a new commandment (John 13:34-35, 1 John 2:1-11).

In Christ we are given new names (Revelation 2:17), enter through a new way (Hebrews 10:19-25) wearing new garments (Luke 5:36-39) and singing a new song (Revelation 5:9-10, 14:1-5). We have come to a new Jerusalem (Revelation 3:11-12, Hebrews 12:18-24) and are eagerly awaiting new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10-14, Revelation 21:1-4) at which point all things will finally be made new (Revelation 21:5-27).

"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). *"For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light"* (Ephesians 5:8).

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But God ...

Adversity drives Christians to the Lord in prayer. Sometimes though it seems he does not hear. Our suffering drags on from hours, to days, to weeks, and longer. We can start to feel abandoned and alone. David expressed this anguish in Psalm 13:1 *"How long, O Lord will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"* Scripture is full of examples of prolonged adversity with relief nowhere in sight. Consider Noah trapped in the ark for almost half a year, Abraham waiting decades for the son God promised, or Israel waiting centuries for their promised Messiah to arrive only to watch him executed. Yet with no possible way out, relief arrived with two simple words; *'but God'*.

Noah was trapped and helpless *"But God remembered Noah ... and caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided"* (Genesis 8:1). For Abraham 99 and Sarah 90, having children was impossible *"But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, ... and I will establish My covenant with him"* (Genesis 17:19). Jesus, the promised Messiah, was nailed to a cross and put to death *"But God raised Him up again putting an end to the agony of death"* (Acts 2:24).

In spite of our impatience, God's timing is always perfect; *"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6,8). So when you feel like you're sinking in suffering remember the Psalmist's cry; *"My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever"* (Psalm 73:26).

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A New Creation

Longer, warmer days bring the feeling of new beginnings. How appropriate Easter occurs in springtime since the cross heralded a new creation. Genesis opens with, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). Echoing this, John's Gospel opens with, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being"* (John 1:1-3). On the sixth day of creation *"God finished His work which He had done"* (Genesis 2:2). On the sixth day of the week, nailed to the cross, Jesus exclaimed *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30). God *"rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done"* (Genesis 2:2). On the seventh day Jesus lay dead in the tomb (John 19:38-42).

From here the parallels break and the two stories diverge. After the seventh day of creation sin entered the world bringing a curse, separation from God, and death (Genesis 3:1-22; Romans 5:12, 8:20-21). In contrast, Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week bringing into the world the gifts of forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life (John 20:1-31; Romans 5:15-21). Although we currently await for the new creation to arrive in its fullness (Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21-22), nonetheless everyone in Christ is a new creature and should walk in newness of life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1-17, 6:3-5). So *"keep seeking the things above, setting your mind on them. Your life is hidden with Christ in God and when He is revealed you also will be revealed with Him in glory"* (Colossians 3:1-4).

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