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Introduction to this Devotional

"The world can no longer be left to mere diplomats, politicians, and business leaders. They have done the best they could, no doubt. But this is an age for spiritual heroes- a time for men and women to be heroic in their faith and in spiritual character and power. The greatest danger to the Christian church today is that of pitching its message too low."

— Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives

We all have a practical theology whether we are the most committed disciple of Jesus Christ or the most ardent of atheists. Some of us are driven by a dogmatic set of standards, others by a strict belief in what we have been taught thus far and still others of us are driven by our personal experience.

Theology is the study of God. In this volume, we will focus on the orderly, coherent study of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith. Friends and family members of Willerup Church have submitted content for your consideration as we work through various aspects of building a systematic theology.

Theology is a broad term. There are subdivisions of Christian theology such as:

- 1. Pneumatology: the Study of the Holy Spirit
- 2. Christology: the Study of Christ
- 3. Ecclesiology: the Study of the Church
- 4. Hamartiology: the Study of Sin
- 5. Eschatology: the Study of Death, Judgment, Final Things

Engage with the content of this devotional as if you were on a route of discovery. There will be familiar words or phrases and there will be challenges. Consider this devotional as a resource for you to turn to when someone asks you what you believe and why. The world will come to you with questions. It is our prayer that you are equipped and prepared to lead them to the One who is the answer to all our questions: Jesus Christ.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

A. Introduction to Theology

For the glory of God

the oloogy

/THēˈäləjē/



- 1. From theos which means "God" and logos which means "logic."
- 2. Language or discourse about God. It can be a scientific, methodological attempt to understand God's divine revelation. Theology is classically defined as "faith seeking understanding."

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity



Theology is not only the study of God but what God represents in our surroundings.

Any wealth, power, or strength we have originated with God. Any gift or talent we have – the same is true (James 1:17; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11).

As many of you in the church know, I spend a lot of my time working on school, sports, and games. Though what most of you don't know is that I spend a lot of time contemplating questions that there are no easy answers to. One of these questions was regarding the idea of studying God and exactly what it means to follow him. I had been (and still am) wrestling with who God truly is and what he means to me. To take a different perspective on the topic I searched YouTube and found a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto by the name of Jordan B. Peterson. Mr. Peterson had videotaped his lecture series on the Bible allowing me to listen and formulate my own opinions based off his findings. He talked of concepts such as chaos, order, authority, and psychology within the Bible. Through this, I believe I will be able to offer a unique perspective on the study of Theology.

So what really is Theology? Oxford dictionary defines it as "the study of the nature of God and religious belief." Although that idea is very broad and does not follow the representation with which I believe the church wants to present. Theology is not merely the study of God but instead it is the study of how God interacts with the world. As Christians, we believe that God's hand has touched every part of society and that he truly has an intent for everything, for "when God speaks, every detail He utters has an impact on every other detail" (6, Sproul). A question arises from this fairly quickly though. Since we know that God is perfect we can therefore deduce that he is also consistent in being perfect, as God is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). How can somebody so consistent create something as inconsistent as the world we live in?

I could continue to write about this topic for a while though I do not have the time nor space to do so in this devotional. Instead I want to challenge Willerup to truly think not only about what God is as we have been conditioned to believe Theology represents, but instead to spend time and look around. How is God right in front of you?

Prayer: Jehovah Jireh (The Lord will Provide), How do I know where you are? I see your Bible in front of me, imbuing me words which I know. We try our best to study your world and reveal your intent, though we often get lost in the way. Amen.



2 The Scope and Purpose of Theology

Megan Retzlaff

What is the purpose of theology? The purpose is to know God, and so to be equipped to make Him known to others. To increase our blessing of wisdom and goodness, peace and truth, freedom and security, and to be able to share these to our best ability with others.

When R.C. Sproul covers each of these topics, of course he references relevant Scripture. Good teachers are useful in directing and sharpening our thoughts; I thank God for R.C. Sproul, C.S. Lewis, Oswald Chambers, Dallas Willard, and many others. But my desire in the end is not to know R.C. Sproul's thoughts better, but to know *my God* better. So for each of the topics I covered, I started my studies by reading the parts of God's Word that R.C. Sproul referenced, not just the particular verses mentioned, but material surrounding them, often the full chapter.

Acts 17:16-34 Ephesians 4:4-13 2 Timothy 3:14-17 Psalm 46:10-11

Theology is something that every Christian engages in, though most of us don't call it by that name. We want to know God, and understand what He is teaching us. So why not try to do this well? We don't all need to be academic experts, but we can each learn something new every now and again. If we don't grow in our knowledge, the topic can become stale and boring. God forbid we allow God Himself to seem boring!

And if you have a job, and there is equipment provided for you, whether tools, protective gear, or the latest software, wouldn't you be foolish not to use it? 2 Timothy 3:17 says that the Scripture is provided "that the man of God may be complete, equipped ..." – it is our equipment for life!

So if theology is something we are all already doing, thinking about, and learning, then what are the appropriate sources for us to learn from? Clearly, the Bible is our primary source, our gift of knowledge from God, our love letter. Secondly, God has given us teachers, over the years, to help us understand the Bible. We are not each expected to read thousands of pages of information and analyze and synthesize it independently. Jesus was a teacher, and he appointed the Apostles as teachers, who then appointed others. Learning from the tradition of the great teachers of the ages is not wrong, as long as we remember which words come from God and which from human teachers. Do not treat R.C. Sproul's words as Scripture, or Pastor Jen's either. But if their words align with Scripture and help you to understand it, then by all means, use them to help you grow and mature!

Theology is a science, the science of understanding the one who created the universe. It is the most important of the sciences, the root of all the rest.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:25-26

Prayer: God, may I come to know You a little better every day, to remember that to know You is to know love. To know You is to have eternal life, abundant life. To know You is to stand on the Rock, not on the sinking sand. Amen



3 General Revelation and Natural Theology

Pastor Jen Wilson

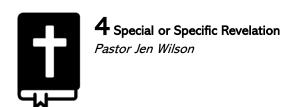
The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Psalm 19:1 NIV

Gazing into the night sky during the summer is one of my favorite things to do. I eagerly paid attention to everything my dad said when I was a child as he helped me discover the Big Dipper, Little Dipper, and the North Star. I would imagine being covered in stardust from being outside under the night sky. I was thrilled to be the first to recognize shooting stars or possibly a satellite as it drifted into and then out of sight. The darker the night, the more glorious the cosmic display. The Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights, in their galactic brilliance captured my imagination and I was hooked! An amateur stargazer was born.

A revelation means making something clear which was hidden. In Christian theology, there are two types of revelation: general and specific. Just like the stars, moon, and planets of our galaxy are available for everyone to see, general revelation is available to everyone no matter where they are on the planet or what they believe. General revelation provides clues about the truth of God. God doesn't hide. He can immediately be found. He longs for us to seek Him, to ask about who created the heavens, and to dive deeper into the questions of why He created them and us.

The Bible is the *specific revelation* of God and states that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God created it all and it was good. Creation may be the way God captures our attention. Creation is God's theater and everyone is invited to explore it. Then through reading and exploring the specific revelation of the Bible, we discover God's revelation of His goodness, love, beauty, order, purpose, and meaning. The Bible is God's specific story in the midst of all the other stories in the world. The Bible holds within it the special revelation of the Truth of God and the truth about the situation all human beings face with regards to sin and how sin has affected every facet of our world.

Prayer: God of Wonders, you are the creator of the universe and yet you care about the intimate details of our lives. You display your goodness all around for us to enjoy and you put things into motion for our safety as you govern our world with justice and peace. May we be teachable. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Amen.



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 NIV

I am a texter. I use emojis. I use icons, symbols or characters to communicate. They are a helpful nuisance for positive connections and can display emotions, support or encouragement. I even have an Avatar. I like to communicate with short bursts of information and respond the same way. I can respond almost immediately to most texts and I send texts to family, friends and colleagues at odd times of the day or night *just to bug them.* Yes, I am a *texter*.

Sometimes, I receive specific texts and the content has deep meaning or encouragement. Other texts can be informational, like a quick "I am going to be late," or a request like "let's get together for coffee." Other texts have content that requires follow-up. There are texts that I ignore, others I refuse to answer and some I delete. Texting is simply one medium of communication.

In a similar way, God is a texter, too. God communicates well! His content is clear and concise. God communicates generally through nature and He communicates *specifically or specially* though his Word. His text includes an entire library for us to explore called the Bible. I think of the Bible as a specific or special way to learn about God, the world, humanity and the situation we live in day to day.

Texts are super important...if we read them.

What we read tends to linger in our brains like snapshots in our mind or fuel for our soul. God's text, the Bible, is also filled with icons, words, symbols and characters. In the midst of all the other stories in the world about all the other people, their beliefs and histories, the Bible and God's special or specific revelation is designed to reveal God's special Truth. We might be able to get smidgens of the Truth elsewhere. But, if it is the Truth, and nothing but the Truth we want, God's Word, the Bible, is the place we turn.

There is something else that is astonishing about God's text and special revelation: Jesus Christ is God's Word in human flesh. The text became human and lived among us for a while (John 1:14). The text has flesh and bone, heart, mind, soul and strength. God's 'flesh-text' *loves, teaches, sacrifices, restores, and so much more.* Jesus is God's special revelation in the midst of all the other stories in the world. Jesus can be trusted to reveal the Truth about all the other people, their beliefs and histories. Jesus reveals God's special Truth. God's Truth sets us free (John 8:32).

Prayer: Jesus, you are God's text come to life. May you be more than a Word. May you be my Truth. Amen



5 Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

Peg Korth

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8 NIV

I love how GOD draws us in, in Genesis 1:1, *In the beginning GOD created the Heavens and the Earth.* I am inspired every day by reading the Scriptures. Each day a new insight appears. Open our eyes, Lord, to see glimpses of Heaven everywhere.

We read about the authority of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16, *ALL SCRIPTURE is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

I remember singing "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," in Sunday School when I was 5. Oh how wonderful to know Jesus loved me. Then in 7th and 8th grade Confirmation class we learned the Scripture and memorized it <u>2 hours every Saturday for 2 years</u>, reading and studying Scripture. I know we memorized 2 Timothy 3:16, *All Scripture is God-breathed ...*

How reassuring to know God cares enough to give us a Divine Book to read so we will be instructed in the way of the LORD. I am inspired to do my very best for God, for in Him I live and move and have my being. Pastor Marlyn Kempf always said BIBLE stands for Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us this day and every day to take time to read Your <u>Holy Living</u> <u>Word</u> that we might be inspired to reach others with Your saving grace. Amen.

*For your consideration: think about the importance of generational influence and inheritance. Every child will look to an authority to determine the truth for their lives. The authority the child chooses will determine what the child believes and how the child lives. To choose the Bible–God's Word–as authority means that we believe the Bible has the right to define what is good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, and to direct how we live.

Developing a **Biblical worldview** means we believe the Bible is God's Truth—even though we may not always understand it. When someone has a Biblical worldview, the Bible is the ultimate authority because it receives its authority from God. We do not give the Bible its authority. The Bible is authoritative regardless of what we believe about it. There is an **ongoing revelation** that is both personal and public about the Bible—that we must decide if the Bible will have functional authority in our entire life, or if we will live according to a different authority.

The choice is up to us.



But, what about you? He asked. Who do you say that I am? Matthew 16:15 NIV

Hot Potato

Do you remember playing the game Hot Potato as a kid? I do. A small item was passed from child to child while the music played and it was 'too hot to handle!' Quick, get rid of it! Don't get caught holding onto it—it will burn you!

If there is a *hot potato* within Christian circles today—and I mean *all* Christian circles, it is the topic of the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible. So, let's first reduce the anxiety and fear: God is stable and he can handle our inquisition. God loves us unconditionally and He makes no errors in his judgment. His covenants, promises and Word are still infallible.

Each of us has to answer the important question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Matthew 16, Mark 8, and Luke 9 include this interaction between Jesus and his disciples. The Greek text uses *Christos* as their response. As I compare the different translations, some translations use the word *Messiah*. Bible translators and interpreters differ and have varied points of view. There is truth to Jesus being the Messiah, but there is no undermining of Jesus or his authority. The Truth about Jesus is not undermined by our inability to interpret or analyze what is written. *Christos* is the word used for ultimate authority. Much like *Caesar* Augustus was the authority of the Roman Empire, *Christ* Jesus is the ultimate authority over *everything* – *even death*.

The Word or Jesus Christ's infallibility does not hinge on our belief, interpretation, comprehension, and acceptance. Jesus fulfilled and is the fulfillment of God's Word in every aspect. Jesus is the stable, unwavering Truth whether we believe or not. The Bible is God's infallible Word. It is without limitation or error with regards to sin, salvation, redemption, and our need of a Savior. God's Word will never fail (Luke 1:37).

Consider this: Jesus is trustworthy, not only because Jesus said so, but because his actions line up with his words. He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). The infallibility and inerrancy of God brings stability to the Truth discovered within God's Word—both written and living—which does not and cannot fail. There is no error. More importantly, the infallibility and inerrancy of God's Word—written and Jesus—can be tested.

Prayer: Alpha and Omega, you are the Beginning and the End. Through you all things were made; without you nothing was made that has been made. Incarnate Word of God, in you was life, and that life was the light of all. Your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Jesus, in a world of constant turmoil and change, be my ultimate authority, now and always. Amen



He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:5 NIV

How do we know the Bible is trustworthy?

Quite often I ask (and am also asked), "How do you know what you know?" Going deeper into the knowledge of what we state as truth, and how we know it can be frustrating, enlightening, and/or even multiply the questions swimming in our mind.

The authority of God is absolute, that is, a simple abstract we can all get behind. The Bible itself, however, is a collection of writings of many authors, often inspired by God's and Jesus' direct presence with those authors. The question that may result might be, how do we know the leaders that decided on what writings comprise the Bible got it right? In a fascinating theology class I took during college, I was fortunate to receive a more objective view of various religious texts, including writings of new books, additional chapters and verses that do not show up in the Bible we are accustomed to reading. So, naturally, curiosity would lead to asking why something is added or not added (or possibly removed) from the Bible. Did God give the right answers to the group of leaders that formalized the books that would become known as the Bible? Or did someone make a mistake along the way? Compounding these questions are the issue surrounding translations from the original languages, and new translations that spring up (think NIV, NASB, KJV, the Living Bible, etc.). If your head is not already spinning, good for you.

From an academic point of view, it is easy to get lost in these contemplations. While it may be a worthwhile endeavor to learn how the modern Bible came to be, one ought to be careful not to cloud the reason and benefits the Bible offers us all: an account of the history of God and Jesus with humanity, and an instruction manual. Namely, how we, as fallible humans, can endeavor to adhere to God's will, hold Jesus as our savior, and strive to become more like Jesus.

Just crack open the Bible and read! It may seem like a simplification, and to some extent it is, but that is my point. We have to trust that over the centuries, with the countless number of individuals that spent their entire life researching, debating, praying, and communicating with others of the like, that God put the right leaders in the right spot to get the proper collection of books for the Bible.



View One: The Icing and the Cake

While hearing the interpretation of other godly people is extremely helpful, it should never be a substitute for reading the Bible personally

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

As a shiny-new Christian at the age of 30, I found my way into a Bible Study called "Young Moms Bible Study." We were from all walks of life, and all different denominations. What bonded us was the challenges of motherhood, the role of being a Christian wife, and our love of Christ. We would be studying a chunk of scripture, and quite often I would be moved powerfully by what it said. What amazed me is that I would then come to the meeting and someone else would also be powerfully moved... but in a totally different way! We would discuss our "aha" moments and often found that we interpreted the same scripture totally differently. This was rather puzzling, as the words on the page were identical!

The truth is that all scripture is going to be filtered through the glasses of the Holy Spirit within each of us, and the experiences of the reader. Because the Holy Spirit works with us individually, the scripture takes on different meaning depending on who is reading it. While hearing the interpretation of other godly people is extremely helpful, it should never be a substitute for reading the Bible personally. It's like eating the icing, and forgetting the cake. God may be trying to teach my pastor something with a scripture, and they may interpret it accurately – but accurate for themselves. If the only understanding of a specific scripture comes through a sermon, it is possible to miss out on what God wants to say specifically to me. Truly, the best way to have the fullness of God's message to me is to read the Bible myself AND listen to others' interpretations. Go ahead and eat the icing, but don't forget the cake!

View Two: Keeping Up with the Bible

The Word is living, changing with my needs.

Hebrews 4:12–13 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Sunday School was always fun for me. I remember learning about Moses – the baby floating in the water. I knew about a river because as a child, I regularly went swimming in the Mississippi River. This was a story I understood. I read the story again as a young mother, and I noticed the anguish of Moses's mother. I sympathized with her sending Miriam, the sister, to watch over the baby. I had done that before in my own home – asking the sibling to care for the infant. Wait, was the sister there before? Had I not noticed it? I studied the story of Moses **again** when my kids were in high school. I saw a story of hope. For the first time, I noticed the great lengths that the Hebrews went through to get rid of sin – Moses giving the detailed instructions for the sacrifices that went on and on. Easter that year was meaningful because of my new understanding of those sacrifices. The words were the same as they had always been, yet God's message to me changed according to what was going on in my life.

The truth is, every time I read the Bible is an opportunity for God to speak to me. The Word is living, changing with my needs. It knows my very inner being – and God knows what I need to hear. In our culture today, people will believe that they completely know what is contained in this amazing book. But how can we possibly keep up with it? Every time we read it, the meaning changes! Because God knows our inmost thoughts and attitudes, we need to give him every opportunity to speak to us through his Word. With the help of the Holy Spirit, what he told us yesterday may be different from what he has for us today. The only way to keep up with the Bible is to set aside time every day to hear what God says!

Prayer: Author of the Living Word, may your Holy Spirit bring the message of your Word to me in a fresh and exciting way. Allow me to be the student at the feet of Jesus learning as you teach me your ways. Amen.

B. Theology Proper -The Character and Nature of God



For the glory of God

char-ac-ter

/'kerəktər/

- 1. An engraving tool or its mark.
- 2. Features and traits forming a person's nature and thus a clue to moral and ethical qualities. It includes ways of acting, responses, and ways of perceiving situations. It is the enduring personality on which morality is evaluated.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity



I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10 NIV

"What are those for?" I asked. The trainer looked at me and smiled with a *Grinch-who-stole-Christmas grin.* "They help you become strong." I sheepishly chuckled.

I would frequently talk myself out of going to the gym. I know how good I feel afterwards. I know how much better my body works when I work out. I know how important exercise is for me. Over the years, I realized that I am my own worst enemy. I know there are huge improvements in my mood, my disposition and my ability to respond to the challenges of life. I know *some* things about myself—but I also know there is still much to learn.

Knowledge of God is similar. There are ways we know God. He reveals himself in his Word, in Creation, in history, in our faith and in our relationships. We can know that all the things in the Bible are true. We can know the complex, far-out things of God. We can know all this and more! Truthfully, we can know *some* things about God. But, our knowledge of God can be put into a *tiny little thimble*. It's like this: what we really have is a thimble full of water compared to the vast expanse of the ocean. Each of us stands on the beach with our tiny thimble full and there we consider how vast and deep and wide our God truly is...

Can I know myself and God... better?

Consider that knowing yourself and knowing God can go hand in hand. Self-awareness and self-discovery can become tools that help grow your relationship with God. Sure, we can fall into the trap of too much self-awareness and become self-absorbed. But, from what I have witnessed—we can be too hard on ourselves. We are far more grace-filled with others than we are with ourselves.

Let's not forget that God is also working in our relationship. Selfishly, we sin, we take a wrong turn. He is committed and will graciously guide us back to Him. Self-discovery can be a journey of trusting God to be good and having our best interest at heart. Do you really believe He would never leave you and do you believe He has your best interest at heart? Trust Jesus and get to know him.

When was the last time you thanked God for how you've been created? Remember, you can't genuinely express deep gratitude for a gift if you haven't fully experienced the gift. As the saying goes: What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God. - Hans Urs von Balthasar

Prayer: Thank you, God, for creating me. Help me know you, so I can know myself. Amen.



Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Deuteronomy 6:4

Let's face it. The trinity can be confusing, especially for folks looking in on Christianity and only getting bits and pieces of God's message. Is it one God or three? How can God be God and the Father be God, Jesus be God, and the Holy Spirit be God all separately but yet all at once? One in Essence, Three in Person. How can this be?

First-let's focus on those things that make God uniquely God. the general qualities of His divine essence that are different from any other entity. What is this essence that is ONE!

The Greek word *ousia* means divine essence in a general sense. We can think of this as a term to help describe what God is. The qualities of God that make him uniquely God. His makeup. He is Creator, Redeemer, Savior, Sustainer, Empowerer. Giver of Salvation to His children. Only God is those things. One in Essence. Those qualities make him GOD. Like no other god, idol, or icon used in other religions.

The best analogy that I can give is to think about water. The water molecule is H20. 2 atoms of hydrogen are bonded with 1 atom of oxygen. That unique combination of elements bonded in that certain way makes water. Any other combination of atoms would result in something totally different. Only 2 hydrogens and 1 oxygen make water.

Just sit and marvel at that for a minute. This God... whose makeup is Creator, Redeemer, Savior... is my God. The same God that is present with me always. Whose very essence is unlike anything or anyone else ever in all of creation, that ever was and that ever will be. And He's right here, wanting to be in a relationship with me. Desperately wanting to be in relationship with His Church. Wow!!!!!

This is what the LORD says— Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6

Prayer: Marvelous Creator God, we sit in awe of your spirit, your presence, and your essence that is you and only you. Thank you for creating us and including us in your all-encompassing divine makeup. Our hearts are humbled by the love and grace you extend to us. Our spirits are lifted as we look full into your wonderful face. Lord help us to love you with all of our soul, mind, and strength. You are never changing. Your makeup is perfect. It is everything we need. Amen



11 Three in Person

Emily Klingbeil

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

So if God is one... How can He also be three? We hear that term "three in person" thrown around a lot in sermons, in songs, etc. (Is the hymn "Holy Holy" running in your mind right now! I can hear the rich vibrato of the last line now... "God in three persons, blessed Trinity")

The Bible very specifically describes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, each with their own unique way of interacting with God's people. If God is One in Essence, how can He also be Three in Person? If we think of one in essence as the makeup of God, we can think of the Trinity as the 3 ways His makeup gets played out in the life of the Church and in our individual relationship with Him. While all three are fully God, we have the opportunity to connect with God through each in a unique way. God uses each to communicate and relate to us in a different way as well. Same message, just in a different form. Those differences don't undermine the unity of God but build and strengthen the ousia or divine essence of God.

Theologians refer to the concept of the trinity or the "who" of God using the Greek term hypostasis, which means divine essence in a specific sense. So God is One in Essence - Ousia (divine essence in a general sense) with 3 hypostases or 3 unique ways this essence is communicated or portrayed. That "who" He is... gets communicated in 3 specific persons or specific essences. Each unique but yet all connected and fully present even as we are relating to the different persons of God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All unique communications of the same divine essence. The same God.

Let's look at the analogy of water. It's makeup or ousia is H2O. Two hydrogens bonded with 1 oxygen. However... water changes forms based on the situation. It can be solid (ice), liquid, or gas (vapor) depending on the temperature. It has three hypostases. Each form of water has unique characteristics. Water as ice is really hard and stationary. Liquid splashes around and can spill. Vapor floats through the air and can be felt on the skin, but is hard to see.

When our hearts need comfort, reassurance, and grace we reach for God the Father. And He in return communicates warmth, redirection, and assurance in Himself as Father and us as His beloved children. Sometimes we need a savior and a connection to God that is human in likeness. Jesus pours out His Salvation. And other times we need power, courage, and a whisper of hope. So God sends the Holy Spirit sweeping through our being to lift us up.

All the same God with the same makeup. But how amazing that he can show up in such a perfect way based on the situation so that we may hear, see, and be blown away by HIS love for us.

Prayer: Padre Celestial, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo, We come before you humbled by the great lengths you go to to love us as your children and your church. Help us to see you at work in our hearts. Give us the capacity to love you as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit just as you love us. Comfort us and reassure us with your fatherly love. Extend salvation through your Son Jesus Christ, and lead and guide our every minute through the presence of your Holy Spirit. Amen



For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Romans 1:20 NKJV

The incommunicable attributes of God are all that He is and all that we are not, and cannot be: infinite, incomprehensible, self-existent (concept of aseity), self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign, etc. God does not just *have* these attributes but fully *is* and embodies each of these attributes.

The God who made the world and everything in it—He is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. From one man He has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Acts 17:24-28 CSB

Prior to coming to college, I don't think I could've said with confidence that I had a personal relationship with Christ. And with that, I lacked a strong sense of self. Growing up in the church and youth ministries I knew a lot of "head knowledge" about biblical teachings, the message of the gospel, and so forth, but excluded "heart knowledge" of fully accepting the love of my Savior and His complete authority over my life. I did not have the strong relationship with Christ that I so needed and desired but didn't know how to achieve.

When I first started discipleship with my mentor the spring semester of my freshman year of college, I asked her to choose a study for us that she thought I would enjoy. She brought *None Like Him*, a book study by Jen Wilkin (that I highly recommend) on some of these incommunicable attributes of God. We spent weeks studying the things that only God can be, bundled up at a window-side table at a local Caribou. Each week would bring an affirmation, and sometimes a conviction. I learned more and more about God's character and with that, I learned more about myself. Only God is infinite, incomprehensible, self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal, immutable, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and sovereign; and we humans are most decidedly not. God is the Supreme being and has the power of *being*, completely in and of Himself. He is completely self-existent and self-sufficient. He always is and was and will be. How revolutionary then to His creation, us human beings, in knowing and accepting our identity as beings created, derived from, and wholly dependent on God!

In knowing God's incommunicable attributes, and accepting that God is all-powerful and sovereign over everything, including our personal lives, comes confidence in who we are and were created to be. This fact that God is sovereign over my life is something that He has put on my heart over the last few years. His sovereignty is not limited to the general state of the world, natural phenomena, or the governing of the church. And it is not only limited to what I deemed "big decisions" in my life; like going abroad, adding another minor to my studies, or being on the Navs student leadership team. My seemingly small and insignificant day-by-day life is under the constant rule and authority of the Lord. It's been a humbling journey, and He continues to call me out, but when struggling to loosen my grip on my need for control Romans 8:28 rings so beautifully true when considering all of my fears about the Lord's authority over me and my life: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.* - Romans 8:28 (NIV). We can have confidence and trust God will bring the good to fruition (*I know that You can do all things; no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.* - Job 42:2 NIV) because He is eternally all-powerful to do so (even when His good wasn't what we may have originally planned for ourselves!).

In accepting the Lord's sovereignty over our lives we find true freedom in our identity as His beloved creation. That we aren't in charge, that we can't be in charge, and that's a good thing! What an undeserved blessing it is to be the Lord's beloved creation whom He intimately knows and perfectly loves, under His all-powerful loving rule and authority.

Prayer: Yahweh, God who proclaims "I am who I am", I praise you for your sovereignty over all things, and your rule and authority over my life. Let who I am be who You say that I am, a being created, wholly dependent, and perfectly loved by You. Amen.



Therefore, imitate God like dearly loved children. Ephesians 5:1 CEB

Now, to be clear, there are certain areas where **we cannot be like God**. Consider the attributes like his infinity (sorry Buzz Lightyear) or being one of 'the omni's': omniscient—knowing all things, omnipresent—being everywhere, omnipotent—being all powerful. Those are reserved for God alone. Here is the catch: **there are areas where** *I* can be like God and need to concentrate my energy and efforts. Discipleship or apprenticeship or spiritual formation focuses my efforts on how I can be like him as I spend my time, how I invest my money and understand my worldview. I can be most like Jesus in my personal relationships where it matters most.

Inviting the Holy Spirit into our lives is key. The holy presence of God is activated through the Holy Spirit. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is forming us into the likeness of Jesus, (John 14:26 presence, Romans 8:26 work, Galatians 5:22-23 fruit).

Here are a few ideas and areas for all of us to start or focus on:

<u>Holiness:</u> Remember God focuses on holiness not happiness. Motivation is one way to think of holiness. Ask yourself whether your motivations are pure or holy? Ask: is my mind holy, is my heart holy, or am I preoccupied with myself? (Leviticus 11:45 and 20:26, 1 Peter 1:16)

<u>Love:</u> is not selfish. We are called to be conduits of God's love (agape) as love flows from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit toward us and toward the world. All you need to do is allow Jesus the opportunity to show you the way he sees the world. He loved the world enough to die for it. (1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4, John 3:16-17)

<u>Goodness:</u> First remember "good" is a God-defined word. Goodness is not what he does. Goodness is who he is and goodness defines God's character. Goodness is also revealed in outcomes and seen as evidence. (Psalm 119:68)

<u>Justice and Righteousness:</u> God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). God can never sin. God always does what is right. There is no shadow, no darkness, and no selfish intention. Penalty, punishment, and outcomes are consequences of sin. It can be easy to think God is mean and judgmental as he keeps his word and commands.

<u>Wisdom:</u> the book of Proverbs tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Perspective helps. Wisdom is an outcome of putting God first and allowing Him to penetrate our disposition. We live a life that pleases Him.

Ironically, when we get the sequence right by placing God first in all things, we discover the holy, good, just, righteous, pleasing life God intended for us, and we want others to share in it, too.

Prayer: I need you Holy Spirit. I invite you into my life. Help me be like Jesus. Amen.



The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29

Psalm 119:125 1 Thessalonians 4:2-3a Psalm 1

God calls us his Children. Do children know all the business of their parents? Not until they mature. I believe that spiritually none of us will be fully mature until we reach the perfection promised us in Heaven. So I believe it is wise and just of God to not share every detail with us. If God truly is infinitely wise, then we could never comprehend the full knowledge of His Will. We must take what He has made available to us and use it to our best ability. And God's "Will" works differently in different situations.

There are certainly events that God wills to absolutely happen, in His sovereignty. When God spoke the world into existence, the world did not have the option to say, "no, I don't feel like existing today."

And there are other events that are God's will, He desires them, but we choose according to *our* free will. God's law tells us His will, what he desires, what would be best. But we do sometimes say about the things in God's law, "I don't feel like it."

Then there are decisions we must make for which neither choice would be entirely Good or Evil, but simply different. Which job to take? Which person to marry? We can study the Scriptures for advice in these things, and find guidance. But God has not determined every step for us. He likely has advice, if we can discern it, on our major decisions. But if we choose something different, He will not abandon us. He will use the choice we have made and create opportunities for us to serve Him and do good to others on whatever path we take.

It is good that we want to know exactly what God would have us do. But God did not create us as holy robots, with only one right program to follow. He gives us choices, and we (usually) strive to honor Him. In some things, God will cause to happen what He requires to happen. In some, we simply get to choose. In some, He has an ideal, allows our missteps, and nudges us toward what's best, if we will listen.

The best way, perhaps, is to be prepared in advance for these decisions, by spending time with God daily, in prayer, in His Word, and in fellowship with His People. Don't cram for the test the night before. Attend class and read the textbook every day!

Prayer: God, help me to seek your counsel. I know I will make mistakes. But I know I CANNOT break Your sovereign eternal plans, and as for my personal path, You will always guide me back, if I will listen. Amen



Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. Matthew 6:8b

God created the world and continues to sustain it. Yet, most people don't realize that God is in charge from beginning to end. This is known as Divine Providence.

I am fascinated by the roots of words and by the depth of meaning those roots reveal.

Providence: the root is pro (before) + videre (to see, envision). We phrase it, "to see beforehand." Divine Providence means that "God sees ahead" (pro-vision), and in addition, He provides for what He sees.

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, <u>God</u> created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word for created is "bara." Bara means that what God created and set into being, He also sustains and preserves - keeps it going. That further means that you and I are part of the continuum of creation and are dependent on Him for our moment-to-moment existence. "For in Him, we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)

All through the Bible, we see that God has provided for His people: the dimensions and materials for Noah to build the Ark; the ram in place of Isaac for Abraham's offering; the pillar of fire and the cloud that led the Israelites to the Promised Land; the prophets who gave both warnings and hope; the feeding of the 5000 from just five Ioaves of bread and two fish; healing of the blind, deaf, and lame; and then, the greatest provision of all - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation. God foreknew that we would mess up and planned beforehand how to solve the problem of sin. He is always for us, always wants the best for us, even when our choices are not good, or when other people do things that harm us. (Romans 8:28- "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God...") He takes our lives, all the good and bad, and arranges second chances - or third, or fourth, or more, as He moves us forward to a wonderful eternity with Him. That's Divine Providence.

Prayer:

Jehovah Jireh (You who provide) Always present, always beside,
Holding the world in Your mighty hand,
Moving it toward what You've already planned.
Through our sins and our sorrows, You work for our best.
That's why we know, in You we can rest.

Loving Caring, Providing God, we trust You and give You thanks. Amen

C. In the Beginning (Anthropology and Creation)



For the glory of God

an·thro·pol·o·gy

/ anTHrə päləjē/

The doctrine of humanity that views humans in terms of their relationships to God. It includes critical reflection on issues such as the origin, purpose, and destiny of humankind. We view all these in light of Christian theological understandings.

hu·man·i·ty

/(h)yoo manədē/

The theological understandings of humankind's creation by God, sinful nature, redemption through Jesus Christ, and ultimate destiny of God's future reign.

"It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular."

- C.S. Lewis



Psalm 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*Genesis 1:31 *And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.*

Matter Matters to God

The phrase "creatio ex nihilo" (Latin for "created out of nothing") is a theological concept that means: 1) God created everything, all matter and time, 2) He created it out of nothing - meaning that there was no pre-existing material that He used - and, 3) all of creation is totally dependent upon Him for its continued existence.

One good thing about long winter nights is the opportunity for lots of star-gazing. Peering into the universe reminds me that we are part of an enormous and diverse place. What caused the billions of stars, galaxies, and the formation of our own unique planet Earth? What is our place in the universe? *Creatio ex nihilo* reminds us that God is not a part of the universe nor subject to its rules. He initiated it and made all that there is! In contrast, we are "dirt" people, part of creation, made of minerals and carbon, subject to the dimension of time, the forces of gravity, and the desire for a really good piece of chocolate cake.

Lately, space and physics are popular topics with my teenage kids at the dinner table. Science magazines cover our coffee table. It seems from the tiniest parts of atoms to the outer edges of the universe, there is no end to the "treasures" and puzzles that await discovery. While I don't understand half of what my kids are talking about, I do catch their excitement. Standing outside on a clear winter night, viewing stars millions of light years away, realizing that God set this all in motion and devised it all from scratch makes me say, "Great is the Lord and worthy of praise!"

Prayer: Creator God, it is you who has made everything and set the forces of the universe into motion. It is enormous, it is beautiful, it fills me with wonder as I raise my arms up in worship to you! Amen



Submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

The Lord of the Jungle

My mother often told me the story of how as a girl growing up their house backed up to railroad tracks, and hobos from the trains would regularly join the family for dinner. The hobos were always invited in, because Grandma and Grandpa knew the scripture that says that one never knows when you may be entertaining angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). God's creation includes the supernatural in addition to flesh and blood. Be very clear – the devil is real and wants us to be separated from God. Don't be fooled by the comical depiction of the devil in a red suit with a pitchfork. This is not a biblical representation, but was created in the Middle Ages as a way to resist the devil by mocking him through this cartoonish imagery.

There is a real spiritual battle that is occurring on this earth, and it affects us. The devil is like a roaring lion who is on the prowl looking to deceive and tempt (I Peter 5:8). This spiritual war is for the hearts and minds of people, as the forces of evil fight to turn us away from God and separate us from God. But take heart! The devil may be like a roaming lion, but God is the Lord of the Jungle. He and his angels are fighting for us. The Bible tells much about the angels and their work on our behalf (in the New Testament the Greek word for "angel" actually appears more often than the words for "love" and "sin").

Don't become discouraged by spiritual warfare that affects your life – the devil, angels, and demons are created beings and are not divine like God.

Guard your thoughts and mind with the knowledge of salvation and victory that is through Christ. Pray. God is more powerful and his angels will minister to us and for us. We can have peace.

Prayer: God our Fortress and Protector, we hide beneath your wing like a child under the table during a thunderstorm. Not until we are much older do we realize that we no longer have to hide. You are Lord of all, even when it feels like you're not. Help me trust you as Lord of the Jungle. Amen.



So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:27 NKJV

When this exercise was mentioned in one of our Board meetings, I thought it to be a beneficial exercise and agreed to take a topic to write on. Then the panic set in as I realized I didn't have the spiritual foundation to expound on this topic!

I listened, finally, to R.C. Sproul's 20-minute presentation and dutifully took notes!

I then sat down to do my daily reading and guess what verse was in my reading?

Psalm 105:4 – Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.

This fit into my note taking and as R.C. presented observations on evolutionary ideas and some of the pessimistic views that exist today, I realized I wanted to seek the face of someone in my image – not some slimy creature coming from the sea!

We, mankind, were created in His image and that gives us great powers – to think, have humanity, and rationalize. Mankind can contemplate, yes, we can talk or communicate with our God – we have the power to be moral – to do all of this we must have a mind!

Yes, there was the great Fall, but we were not abandoned – God sent Jesus, the express image of God, to save the world.

We think and we reason, and I for one cannot look at God's great creation and accept that it just happened.

Prayer: My sweet Lord, thank you for stepping in as you always do to help me form thoughts and present ideas – why I ever doubt that You will help me is merely an indication of my constant need to grow with You. Amen.

"God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there."

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity



19 The Nature of Sin

Megan Retzlaff

To sin means to "miss the goal." What is the goal? Love for God and people. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to respect others, treating them like they are important and valued. The 10 Commandments in Exodus 20:1-13

tell us how to love God and humans. Jesus simplifies it for us in this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. Matthew 22:37-40

Genesis 3 Genesis 4:1-12 Romans 3:9-10, 19-20

Romans 7:18-20, 24-25 Romans 8:3-11

Sin is turning, or walking, or running away from God. Sin is thinking we know better than God. Whether we admit it or not, every time we knowingly sin, we are expressing that we think our own plan is the one to follow, not His.

When we sin, we may believe that there is some flaw in His instructions to us, that He must have missed some detail which would show that it really is okay to do what we are doing. We think that it is necessary to act in this way, either in service of some good concept we have come to idolize, or to heal some hurt that we think cannot be healed by God's methods.

Or, we sin knowing that what we do is wrong, but thinking it isn't important, it won't have much effect.

Or we know that God is right, but we simply desire rebellion. We are convinced that serving our own desires now is worth it.

When sin is discussed in the Bible, the word "flesh" is used often to indicate the desires of our bodies, as distinct from the desires of our spirit.

God gave us the physical world as a gift. Flesh is not inherently evil; God gave us these bodies and declared his creations "very good" (Genesis 1:26-31). But then we invited evil into the good gift (Genesis 3). We allowed something else to rule over our flesh, and the flesh began to fight against the spirit, rather than the spirit ruling in wisdom and goodness over the flesh.

(Are our flesh/bodies and our spirits separate, different entities? That would be a long study, but I believe one way to look at it is that they are no more separate and different than my arm and my leg, very much connected, different parts, different presentations, of the same being.)

It would seem that body and spirit would have the same desires, but when sin entered the world, it deceived us, and created conflict, even within ourselves, so that now the flesh works against the spirit (Romans 7:18-20, 24-25).

Prayer: God, help me. Sin is crouching at my door, it wars with me inside my very flesh! And yet, through Jesus' sacrifice, I am free, thanks be to God! Help me to navigate this life influenced by both sin and goodness, until I reach final freedom in Your Eternal Kingdom! Amen



And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:18-20 NKJV

At one time long ago, sin did not exist. Original sin began in Heaven rather than in the Garden of Eden. It began when Lucifer, alias Satan, the devil, wanted to replace God by taking over the Kingdom of Heaven. He failed. Satan went to earth to establish his authority there, taking with him the 1/3 of his angel followers, now referred to as demons.

Satan now tempted the earth's managers, Adam and Eve, urging them to declare their independence and become their own gods. Now sin entered the world of humanity, establishing spiritual DNA which is passed down through all humanity. This tendency for rebelling against God's rulership is fulfilled with what theologians call actual sin. How long does it take before a child demonstrates that sin has become a part of his life?

Martin Luther categorized sin into 2 groups. They are sins of commission and sins of omission. These two kinds of sin were described by Jesus in the parable of The Good Samaritan. The thieves committed sin by robbing and beating the traveler. The religious leaders sinned by ignoring the needs of the injured man.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, We thank you for pouring out Your Loving Grace which cancels the consequences of sin for all those who in faith trust that You have forgiven us through the sacrificial death of Christ. Amen.

"If everyone were born in a state of moral neutrality, you would expect statistically that approximately 50 percent of those people would grow up and never sin. But that's not what we find. In fact, whatever the moral standards are of the culture in which they live, nobody keeps them perfectly. Even the honor that's established among thieves is violated by thieves. No matter how low the level of morality is in a given society, people break it."

So there is something indubitable about the fallenness of our human character. All people sin.

-R C Sproul, Foundations series



Many people were made righteous through the obedience of one person, just as many people were made sinners through the disobedience of one person. Romans 5:19 CEB

Sin. It's such a pesky little word. We don't use it anymore. Sin makes me think of God. Sin makes me think of judgment. Sin would mean there's an ultimate moral absolute out there and I'm accountable. Come to think about it: if it's true, I might have to beg for forgiveness.

Sin is a noun. Sin is a verb. I can be *sinning* which means sin is active. I am pretty sure there is a state of sinfulness for which we are probably all going to be punished.

Sin means I oppose God and I do it on purpose! I make the choice. Sin means it was willful. Sin means I knew it was wrong when I did it and that doesn't make me feel very good. In fact, if I commit a sin, after a while I think I'm a bad person. So we don't use that word.

We like this word: mistake. "I made a mistake"—sounds better. Here is the definition of mistake: "A mistake is an error in action, calculation, opinion, or judgment caused by poor reasoning." How about if we redefine this situation and consider that we all make mistakes?

If we settle for merely calling ourselves "mistakers," then we'll never admit we're *sinners*. This is a condition, a situation we are all in! If we never admit we're sinners, then we'll never admit our need for a Savior. If we can all be mistakers, then all you have to do is *do better*. Mistakers just have to *try harder*. Mistakers just have to break little, nasty habits. Mistakers just have to be more consistent. Mistakers just have to try harder next time.

This sounds pretty bad doesn't it?

Reality check: if I'm a sinner, then that seems to be more fundamental to who I am. Simply trying harder isn't going to get it done, because if I'm a sinner, then I probably owe somebody something. If I'm a sinner, trying harder isn't going to help me. If I'm a sinner, I need a Savior.

The problem is that we know ourselves. The problem is that we know better. I recognize that, no, I'm not just a mistaker. I'm a sinner and I've sinned against the Lord. I owe a debt I can't pay. And I believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he paid the debt for my sin. And today, as an individual, I am receiving that gift freely. I'm transferring my trust from my abilities, to the completed, finished work of Christ on the cross. **That's what it means to become a Christian**. That's what it means to engage with the Savior. That's how sinners get into the kingdom of God.

Here's the great news. *Good* people don't go to heaven. *Forgiven* people go to heaven. And forgiveness is found through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, I am in serious trouble, I get it. This is the deal-breaker and it is breaking me wide open to receive your forgiveness. I am a sinner and I need a Savior—that's YOU! Amen.



My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Psalm 89:34 NKJV

To show you how important the word "covenant" is, it is used approximately 280 times throughout the Bible.

Biblical covenants are promises of God to man, usually carrying conditions to be fulfilled by man, as recorded in the Bible. God's promise, in the New Covenant, is not based on written laws, but on grace alone, placed on the hearts and in the minds of believers by the Holy Spirit.

Because man could not fulfill the promises of God, (covenants) they were ultimately fulfilled by Jesus' life and works and sacrificial death, fulfilling the New Covenant.

Covenants God made progressed from the one made with Adam, to one made with Noah, then Abraham, then Moses, then David, and then with all believers through Christ. God has given us His word, in Christ, that He will fulfill all He has said.

My favorite covenant is found in Genesis where God made a covenant with Noah. After destroying the earth and every living thing because of all the evil (except for Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark) He would never again destroy the earth by flood, and he would place a rainbow in the clouds. This was a sign of the covenant for all generations to come.

After every rain, when the sun comes out, I search for a rainbow. My mind travels back to the time of Noah, I get such a closeness to God our creator, as if He is speaking to me. I feel very blessed to have been exposed to the Word of God, and that I have known about the Covenant with Noah and the meaning of the rainbow.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for Your promises and Your Word. They are honest and true. And thank you for Jesus the Living Word, Our Mediator. Amen.

"If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

D. The Person and Work of Christ (Christology)



For the glory of God

Chris·tol·o·gy

/krisˈtäləjē/

The branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ.

"Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity



Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. Revelation 5:1-8 NIV

The powerful leader that the Jews were waiting for showed up as the gentle leader they didn't know they needed.

The Christ of the Bible is not who we make him. He is who he is. When the people in John's vision say "(B)ehold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah", and a Lamb is standing before them, God is showing us that the Lion has come as a Lamb. Every ounce of power attributed to the Lion, has come to exercise His power with the gentleness of a Lamb, whose immense strength was used to provide gentleness and forgiveness.

The Jews of Jesus' day expected a roaring power to come to help them and only them, instead **all** received the quiet widespread care and forgiveness that the world actually needed. Never confuse the quiet man for the weak man. Too often it's easy to ascribe strength to the loud ones, to the aggressive ones, to the ones who gain attention. It's easy to overlook the quiet humble power of the ones who inexorably move forward without the need of attention.

Prayer: To the one who made the Universe with words before there was language. Please help us to see the small and simple ways that those around us follow your will. Help us to see through the loud and flashy displays of power, so that we can see things clearly. Amen



For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NIV

Spiritual exercise: try to summarize your entire life in a sentence or two or maybe a short poem. What would you include or leave out? Try to identify what is crucial for others to know about you and why you were born.

The assignment would be a daunting task for any of us. And yet, the creeds are something Christians hold on to for life, instruction, correction and in times of sorrow, grief or loss...the truth about our life both here and now and for eternity. The word "creed" comes from the Latin word "credo," meaning "I believe." The creeds of the church are helpful tools in synthesizing the essential, orthodox teachings of the Bible. They are not themselves inspired, but they are the historical Church's summaries of the inspired Word of God. Imagine having your answer ready when someone asks: What does the Bible teach about the person and work of Jesus?

We all know that opinions and doctrines can vary widely across the range of Christendom. But, in a world that is increasingly unChristian, we can use the creeds as a point where we come together to share what we believe.

So who, on a most basic and essential level, is Jesus?

Jesus: is the only. There is no other like him. (Luke 2:11, John 1:1-4, John 20:28) Jesus: is Lord. He is the ultimate authority. He will judge us all. (John 5:22; John 20:28)

Jesus: became human. (John 1:14)

Jesus: is made of the same divinity as the Father and Holy Spirit. (John 5:19-24; John 15:26, Mark 16:19)

Jesus: is the combination of Holy Spirit and human flesh. (Luke 1:27)

Jesus: came to offer us salvation and eternal life. (John 3:16)

Jesus: suffered and was crucified, died and was buried. (John 19:20; Acts 4:10, 1 Corinthians 15:34)

Jesus: rose from the dead after three days and ascended to heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:4, Matthew 28:1, 5-10)

Jesus: will come again (Matthew 24:44; Luke 21:34-36; John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Hebrews 9:28; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 22:12)

Prayer: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus... you are the one and only. Help me believe. Amen.



Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

Working in the office of a church, whose date of becoming a church congregation began in 1844, I've often had visitors looking for church records of their ancestors. I've done my share of searching for people and dates. It is so interesting to me in looking at the names of the early Norwegian immigrants the genealogy and geography that is told in their names! The middle name told who they were the son or daughter of, and the last name was typically the farm/homestead name.

Names have a history of telling our identity, of who we are and whose we are.

Christ Jesus has been given many names in scripture. A few - Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Son of Man, Bread of life, Light of the world, Good shepherd... Lord. Jesus Christ is Lord is recorded to be the earliest creed. This may sound simple, but it was of great importance in a time in Rome when it was required as a citizen to recite publicly "Caesar is Lord."

These early Christians were deeply committed to the mandate received from Jesus to be obedient to the authorities of the land, they paid taxes & obeyed the laws of the state. But they could not give that majesty to Caesar in calling him Lord. They knew who they belonged to and it wasn't Caesar, it was Christ Jesus. The name Lord given to Jesus in Scripture shows us His identity of being the name that is above every name; He is God. Me confessing Jesus as my Lord should reflect how I live out my salvation through him. How do I daily bow my knee to Him? What is Jesus calling me to pay attention to? How do I live a life that will glorify God?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your name is above every name. Guide me as I seek my identity in confessing you as Lord. Thank you, Lord, for loving me and calling me by name into your family as a child of God. Amen.

Every name given to Jesus in scripture has significance, has meaning and reveals something to us about who He is and what He has done.

-R.C. Sproul



And He Himself existed and is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. [His is the controlling, cohesive force of the universe.] Colossians 1:17 Amplified Bible

The states of Christ refer to Christ's role or activity at various times throughout His life and existence. The term "Christology" (from the Greek word *Christos* meaning "anointed one," "Messiah" or "Christ") refers to the study of Christ. It often includes such topics as the preexistence and eternality of Christ, Old Testament prophecies about Christ, Christ's humanity, deity, and incarnation, as well as the issue of his temptations and sinlessness, his death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation, return, three-fold office in regards to the Trinity, and states of his existence. (Whew...deep breath here.)

Remember...this is Jesus, and Jesus loves me.

Who Jesus is to us is deeply personal. The depth of his love for us is sometimes hard to believe since we ourselves lack love in so many areas—either being loved well or loving others well. Jesus' love is unconditional—meaning we can do nothing to achieve it or lose it. Human love is limited and often linked to performance. Love is Jesus' disposition and He loves sacrificially (Philippians 2). When our patience wears thin, when the bills are overdue, and the children are misbehaving, and our spouse is being difficult, do we love self-sacrificially? We all fall short of the love Jesus came to bring. And yet, Jesus challenges us to live our lives out of his love for us, for one another and for those yet to come.

Loving others as Jesus did reminds us that it is Jesus' love that flows through us. We are conduits of his love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Christ, as our example—the powerful Victorious One—loved us so much that He sacrificed everything, including His own life, for our benefit (John 3:16). He was so committed to seeing our relationship with the Father repaired, with seeing us have the opportunity to delight, rejoice, desire, be happy in, and enjoy the Father, that He self-sacrificially loved us, as well as His Father.

Think about that for a moment. Read all this again. Let the depth of that reality sink in. The infinite God, incarnate as Jesus, loved you infinitely!

Become aware of all the terms. Read and study about the huge impact of Jesus. Spend your days learning about how Jesus fulfilled the requirements for justification, rescue, and reconciliation. Understand how sanctification works. Allow the information to persuade you of Christ Jesus' authority and power over the darkness. Most importantly...permit Jesus to love you.

Prayer: Victorious One, I want to serve in your army, but you challenge me to learn how to love first. Help me, Glorious Judge, to accept your love, so that I can love others the way you want me to love...sacrificially. Amen



Jesus is our Prophet, Priest, and King

Jesus does for us what no one else could do—He represents God to us and also represents us to God. He is the promised King Who rules with wisdom and justice.

Hebrews 1:1-3 (CEB, Common English Bible)

1 In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways. 2 In these final days, though, he spoke to us through a Son. God made his Son the heir of everything and created the world through him. 3 The Son is the light of God's glory and the imprint of God's being. He maintains everything with his powerful message. After he carried out the cleansing of people from their sins, he sat down at the right side of the highest majesty.

Galatians 4:3b-7 (CEB)

When we were minors, we were also enslaved by this world's system. 4 But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. 5 This was so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted. 6 Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and if you are his child, then you are also an heir through God.

When I was nine years old my mom found me crying on the couch preparing myself for death. That afternoon something had happened that convinced me I only had hours to live. I knew for certain God was about to send me to hell for eternity, and I was terrified. I was student at a Christian school that had taught me how serious it was to take communion improperly, but when I had attended Catholic summer camp with my friend, and the priest offered me the Host, I couldn't resist. So I knew I was a lost cause. Hell was all I could look forward to, and now I had to face it. I still remember my mom's blunt response to my confession that day: "God doesn't send little girls to hell." I wasn't sure I believed her, but she had at least given me a glimmer of hope. Also I didn't die that night, so God has had a lot more time to tell me about Himself.

My school didn't have much use for Jesus except as a sacrifice for sin. God the Father was Who we read about and prayed to, and He seemed both fierce and fickle to my young mind. Cross the line,

and Zap. Now my school certainly got it wrong, and I love the Old Testament dearly today. My son is named Isaiah for a reason. But it is Jesus Who is essential to me in understanding God's true nature. Paul writes in Colossians that "He is the image of the invisible God." And Jesus said in Luke that the entirety of the Old Testament was written about himself.

I don't think I'm the only one who needed help understanding God. I believe one of the beautiful things Jesus did for humanity was come like a missionary to translate God's loving nature into our language. We Protestants love to be reminded that we are saved by faith, and the more I think about that, the more I understand that so much of my sin is a lack of trust in God. Because if God is Who Jesus showed Him to be, then I have everything I will ever need, and I have it in abundance. All the prophets, priests, and kings of the past were also missionaries and mediators, but not one of them could show us God's heart the way Jesus did. Our sin didn't cause Jesus to toss us away, on the contrary, it drew Him to us. In His compassion He taught us and healed us, and even suffered humiliation and agony for us. In rising from the dead, He demonstrated his Kingship over not only this world but also the world to come. He did this so we could be adopted as God's beloved children forever.

I dearly wish nine-year-old me had known Jesus. I'm so grateful that adult me does. No, our God is not one who sends little girls to hell. He's a God Who puts Himself in harm's way to rescue them from sin and death forever.

Prayer: O God, You comfort us like a mother, You carry us in Your arms like a good shepherd, and You enlighten our minds with our belovedness like a lamp. The more we spend time with You, the more we fall in love with Your nature—one delightful, too-good-to-be-true surprise after another. Thank You for being the Mediator we so desperately need. Thank you for bringing us home. Amen



"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

Jesus died to win victory over sin. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, so that we all could be reunited with Him in the Heavenly realm, sinless.

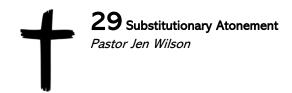
Everlasting Life means Life ETERNAL.

The Garden of Eden was a perfect world (without sin) but it didn't stay that way very long. When Adam and Eve were at of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they disobeyed God and were driven out of the perfect garden. Disobeying God has consequences. God said we would toil in this world, things would be difficult, but He would send One who would take away the sins of the world, and that was God's perfect Son, Jesus. We need to acknowledge God and Repent, then our reward is Heaven.

Prayer: Dear Gracious God, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. May we glory in the qift of ETERNAL LIFE. Amen.

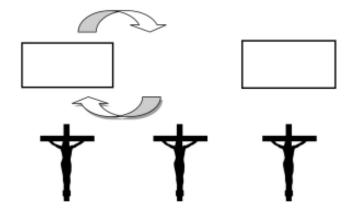
But supposing God became a man — suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God's nature in one person — then that person could help us. He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God. You and I can go through this process only if God does it in us; but God can do it only if He becomes man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we men share in God's dying, just as our thinking can succeed only because it is a drop out of the ocean of His intelligence: but we cannot share God's dying unless God dies; and he cannot die except by being a man. That is the sense in which He pays our debt, and suffers for us what He Himself need not suffer at all.

−C S Lewis, Mere Christianity



"Don't you fear God, seeing that you've also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Luke 23:40-42

The story of the two thieves on the cross can help us understand the substitutionary atonement of Christ.



- 1. Consider three crosses.
- 2. What was true of the two thieves? Fill in boxes above their heads. The two criminals are guilty. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). They deserve, and we all deserve, death.
- **3. What was true of Jesus?** Fill in the area above his head with the words *righteous* (2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 3:9, Galatians 2:16, Romans 1:17) *and innocent* (Matthew 27:4, Luke 23:4, Luke 23;15,1 Peter 3:18). Righteous indicates Jesus actively obeyed and fulfilled the law and will of the Father. Innocence indicates Jesus is the perfect, unblemished sacrifice required before God as Jesus was free from sin and confirmed so by men outside his circle of influence: Judas, Herod, Pontius Pilate, the thief, the Roman soldier, and Roman guards. Jesus was pure, perfect and holy before God. (John 1:29, Isaiah 53:12, Exodus 12:22-23).
- **4. So, how does the thief get to be in paradise?** Notice the line from the thief to Jesus. And then the line from Jesus to the thief. Through the revelation of who Jesus is —the thief accepted Jesus' sacrifice to make up for his failure before God.

- **5. How does this happen?** There are many atonement theories...
- a. Moral Influence: from Augustine in the 4th century, the death of Christ is understood as a catalyst to reform society, inspiring men and women to follow His example and live good moral lives of love. In this theory, the Holy Spirit comes to help Christians produce this moral change. Ultimately, the human race will be judged by their conduct in life. This in turn creates a strong emphasis on free will as the human response to follow Jesus' example. This theory focuses on not just the death of Jesus Christ, but on His entire life. This sees the saving work of Jesus not only in the event of the crucifixion, but also in all the words He has spoken, and the example He has set.
- **b. Ransom theory:** from Origen in the 3rd century, deals more with the actual death of Jesus Christ, what it actually means and the effect it has upon humanity. This theory finds its roots in the Early Church and essentially teaches that Jesus Christ died as a ransom sacrifice, paid either to Satan or to God the Father. Jesus' death then acts as a payment to satisfy the debt on the souls of the human race, the same debt we inherited from Adam's original sin.
- *CONTROVERSY: Redemption in this theory means to buy back and purchase the human race from the clutches of the Devil. The main controversy here with this theory is the act of paying off the Devil. Some have written that this is not a fair statement to say that all Ransom Theorists believe that the Devil is paid, but rather in this act of Ransom Christ frees humanity from the bondage of sin and death. In this way, Ransom relates the Christus Victor theory. But it's worth differentiating here because in one way these views are similar, but in another way, they are drastically different.
- **c. Christus Victor:** classic Christian doctrine from 1st century, Jesus Christ dies in order to defeat the powers of evil (such as sin, death, and the devil) in order to free humankind from their bondage. This is related to the Ransom view with the difference being that there is no payment to the devil or to God. Within the Christus Victor framework, the cross did not pay off anyone but defeated evil thereby setting the human race free.
- **d. The Satisfaction Theory:** from 12th century Anselm, Jesus Christ's death is understood as a death to satisfy the justice of God. Satisfaction here means restitution, the mending of what was broken and the paying back of a debt. In this theory, Anselm emphasizes the justice of God and claims that sin is an injustice that must be balanced. Anselm's satisfaction theory says essentially that Jesus Christ died in order to pay back the injustice of human sin and to satisfy the justice of God.

This theory was developed in reaction to the historical dominance of the Ransom theory, that God paid the devil with Christ's death. Anselm saw that this theory was logically flawed, because *what does God owe satan?* Therefore, in contrast with the Ransom theory, Anselm taught that it is humanity who owes a debt to God, not God to satan. Our debt, in this theory, is that of injustice. Our injustices have stolen from the justice of God and therefore must be paid back. Satisfaction theory then states that Jesus Christ pays back God in His death on the cross to God. This is the first Atonement theory to bring up the notion that God is acted upon by the Atonement (i.e. that Jesus satisfies God and his requirements).

e. The Penalty Substitution Theory: from the Reformers Calvin and Luther, who took Anselm's Satisfaction theory and modified it slightly. They added a more legal (or forensic) framework into this notion of the cross as satisfaction. The result is that within Penal Substitution, Jesus Christ died to satisfy God's wrath against human sin. Jesus is punished (paid the penalty) in the place of sinners (substitution) in order to satisfy the justice of God and the legal demand of God to punish sin. In the essence of Jesus' death, God can now forgive the sinner because Jesus Christ has been punished in the place of the sinner, in this way meeting the retributive requirements of God's justice.

This legal balancing of the ledgers is at the heart of this theory, which claims that Jesus died for legal satisfaction. This theory of the Atonement contrasts with Anselm's Satisfaction Theory in that God is not satisfied with a debt of justice being paid by Jesus, but that God is satisfied with punishing Jesus in the place of mankind. The notion that the cross acts upon God, conditioning Him to forgiveness, originates from Anslem's theory, but here in Penal Substitution the means are different. This theory of the Atonement is perhaps the most dominant today, especially among Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists and some evangelical groups.

- f. The Governmental Theory: is a slight variation. The main difference here is the extent to which Christ suffered. In the Governmental Theory, Jesus Christ suffers the punishment of our sin and propitiates God's wrath. In this way, it is similar to Penal Substitution. However, in the Governmental Theory, Jesus Christ does not take the exact punishment we deserve, He takes a punishment. Jesus dies on the cross therefore to demonstrate the displeasure of God towards sin. He died to display God's wrath against sin and the high price which must be paid, but not to specifically satisfy that particular wrath. The Governmental Theory also teaches that Jesus died only for the church, and if you, by faith are part of the church, you can take part in God's salvation. The church then acts as the sort of hiding place from God's punishment. This view contrasts both the Penal and Satisfaction models but retains the fundamental belief that God cannot forgive if Jesus does not die a propitiating death.
- g. The Scapegoat Theory: is a modern Atonement theory rooted in the philosophical concept of the Scapegoat. Within this theory of the Atonement Jesus Christ dies as the Scapegoat of humanity. This theory moves away from the idea that Jesus died in order to act upon God or as payment to the devil. Scapegoating therefore is considered to be a form of nonviolent atonement, in that Jesus is not a sacrifice but a victim. There are many Philosophical concepts that come up within this model, but in a general sense, we can say that Jesus Christ as the Scapegoat means the following. 1) Jesus is killed by a violent crowd. 2) The violent crowd kills Him believing that He is guilty. 3) Jesus is proven innocent, as the true Son of God. 4) The crowd is therefore deemed guilty. The Scapegoating Theory states, "Christianity is a priestly religion which understands that it is God's overcoming of our violence by substituting himself for the victim of our typical sacrifices that opens up our being able to enjoy the fullness of creation as if death were not."

Prayer: Jesus, the truth about what you did for me can be discovered somewhere in all of these attempts to explain it. Holy Spirit, reveal what you want me to know. Amen.



Those who believe in and love God, who trust in Jesus' sacrifice for them, are saved and will have eternal life. How is it determined who these people will be?

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." ...

Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)
John 6:63-65, 70-71

On the fact of the atonement: We are all quick to ooh and ahh over the baby at Christmas, to thank God for this adorable gift. Can our faith mature so that we can also thank God for the shocking gift of the bloody, disfigured body, hanging dead on the cross?

On the extent of the atonement: Biblical scholars debate over the possibility that some people are predestined to be saved, and thus some are predestined to not be saved. It is a point of struggle for many. I do not understand it, and cannot explain the details. However, it does appear to be true, in my reading of the Bible.

My humble human reflections:

How can I say what is in God's mind? How can I, in my limited experience, say what is best for humanity?

Do I believe because God chose me - or did He choose me because I would believe?

What I know for certain is this: I do believe, and I am thankful.

I believe God is good and just, and so I believe that He has done what is good and just.

Prayer: God, help me not to stumble over the things I cannot understand. Amen

E. The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)



For the glory of God

pneu·ma·tol·o·gy

/ˌn(y)ooməˈtäləjē/

pneuma "spirit" logos "logic" or study of

The third Person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which constitutes the Godhead. The Spirit inspired biblical writers, makes known the saving work of Jesus Christ, and is God present in and with the church. The Spirit acts to incorporate all things into the life of the Triune God.

"It is quite right that you should feel that 'something terrific' has happened to you (it has) and be 'all glowy.' Accept these sensations with thankfulness as birthday cards from God, but remember that they are only greetings, not the real gift. I mean, it is not the sensations that are the real thing. The real thing is the gift of the Holy Spirit which can't usually be—perhaps not ever—experienced as a sensation or emotion. The sensations are merely the response of your nervous system. Don't depend on them. Otherwise when they go and you are once more emotionally flat (as you certainly will be quite soon), you might think that the real thing had gone too. But it won't. It will be there when you can't feel it. May even be most operative when you can feel it least."

- C.S. Lewis



... Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them! Numbers 11:29

When we think of the Holy Spirit, most Christians today think of the Spirit coming down on the apostles at Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' crucifixion and ascension. The Spirit as seen in the New Testament and today, indwelling in every believer, is a dynamic partner in our faith. But the Spirit has always been active in the relationship between God and His People.

The first specific appearance of the Spirit is on the first page of the Bible, Genesis 1:2 and the last is on the last page, in the last 5 verses of Revelation 22. The Spirit is not a sidekick to the Father and the Messiah, instead the Sprit has an equal role and presence.

The Holy Spirit was active in Creation, endowed characters such as Joseph, son of Jacob, with miraculous abilities to further God's plan, and equipped characters such as Samson to protect God's People. It was through the Spirit that artists created the beautiful and symbolic decorations of the Tabernacle while Moses was leading Israel (Exodus 35:30-35). The Spirit spoke to the prophets and enabled them to speak God's Word when it needed to be heard.

And even in the Old Testament, Moses, who had a uniquely close relationship with God, hoped that one day all God's People would have the Spirit. God's Spirit was upon Moses as he led the people. And later God's Spirit came down on 70 elders to help Moses in his task. Then Moses said, ... Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!

Prayer: Thank you Holy Spirit for Your Presence, Guidance, Empowerment, and Comfort, from Creation, to my life Today, to the Last Days!



32 The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

Pastor Jen Wilson

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 2 Corinthians 3:17

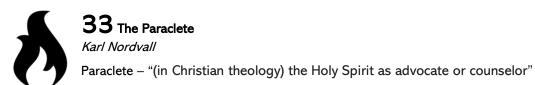
God created human beings as vessels—jars of clay—in need of filling. We are not empty sculptures. We are given spirits in need of redemption. God breathes into us the 'breath of life' that convicts us of our sin, empowers our repentance, redeems us from the consequence of sin, and restores us to the beings we were intended to become. We build the Kingdom of God here on earth by working with the Spirit and are empowered with our spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ which is the Church.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity and in a broad sense all things came into being through Him. Pentecost in Acts 2 was a dramatic outpouring of God's presence. The glory of God is present and reflected as the Spirit created the world through the darkness and chaos in Genesis 1 and as the Son of God became the Incarnation in Matthew 1 and Luke 2.

The New Testament records the dramatic events and the impact of the internal movement of God in the lives of the believers. Here are several ways the Spirit works:

- 1. The Holy Spirit provides unbelievers with the conviction of their lostness and sin. (John 16:7-14, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16)
- 2. The Holy Spirit provides the miracle of new birth and adoption as sons and daughters of God. (John 3, Romans 8:14-17, 2 Corinthians 5:17)
- 3. The Christian life is under the guidance and influence of the Spirit. (John 14:26, Romans 8:14 and 26, Galatians 5:22-23)
- 4. The supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are engaged for the building of the church. (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-19; 1 Peter 4:11)
- 5. The Holy Spirit provides assurance of salvation.(1 Corinthians 2:10-13, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13)
- **6.** To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to become a living image of Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:2 and 9-11; Ephesians 4:13)
- 7. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 4:29-32)
- 8. We are the living temple filled with the Spirit's presence. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- 9. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us. (Romans 8:26-27)

Prayer: Spirit of God—I need you. I need your work in my heart—circumcise my heart! Clear away the dense fog that drifts across my heart and empower me. Spirit of God, fill me. I invite you in. I give you permission to do a new work within me. Hallelujah! Amen! Glory be revealed in me today.



out from the Father—he will testify about me. John 15:26

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes

He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. John 17:14

It's not about us. Too often in the church the Holy Spirit is discussed in terms of what it can do for us. We focus on spiritual power and giftedness. It's as if the Holy Spirit is a supernatural scout leader handing out merit badges to deserving Cubbies. This puts the focus on us and our worthiness.

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Advocate. But what or who is being advocated? The Spirit of Truth was sent to give help and revelation, but to what end? Jesus's words give us the answer:

The Holy Spirit is not advocating for us, but for Jesus. When Christ walked the Earth, he could speak for himself. After his Ascension the disciples were tasked with spreading and defending the Gospel. As with the early church, the Holy Spirit does not fight on our behalf. Rather, the Spirit's power is available to us so that we can fight successfully for Jesus and his glory.

It's not about us. And thank God! Trying to mount our own defense to a hostile world is futile. Especially today – when our whole lives, present and past, are judged against the shifting standards of culture – who can stand? Paul eloquently speaks to this in his letter to the church in Corinth:

When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Prayer: Dear Lord, in one of the great mysteries of faith, you handed over the work of building your church to mere mortals. It often feels so daunting. But you did not intend for us to work with our own strength. You provided an Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Help us to remember that we must humble ourselves to the work of the Spirit in order to speak and act in the power and wisdom that comes from you. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Amen



For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. Acts 1:5 NIV

Making Meaning and Use of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit:

The "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" is about being enabled as a Christian to use the gifts provided to encourage His Church while encouraging others to join!

Let's look at this. BUT FIRST, a STARTING POINT!

Is opening in prayer the "right time" to pray? Closing in prayer? Or, is praying to God an "anytime proposition for any purpose He would "purpose" for us? Especially when seeking an understanding and teaching of His purposes for us, His Church"? Yes? Then in the "spirit" of anytime, let's pray. Pray for the BIG NEXT to be revealed in our Walk with the Lord. Pray to UNDERSTAND and make MEANINGFUL USE of the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' in our lives.

Pray in your words. OR, if you desire, pray this:

Lord God of all, Jesus, my Savior, and you, Holy Spirit present now, I ask that you use this moment in time to reveal with clarity Your Holy Spirit Baptism meaning and purpose to be fulfilled in my life. Just exactly this as per your will! AMEN and AMEN

Then, consider this question. When you accepted Jesus the Christ into your life to be saved, did you fully understand the "Triune God" you were accepting? I did not. A very loving and caring mother, who had lost her husband to kidney failure only two years after the birth of her only son, depended on other teachings about God to "reach me". We discussed little, even as I was loved fully. We will play this forward at the end.

Now this! When you accepted God through Jesus Christ and consequently were converted to Christianity and the Christian life, were you clear that the Holy Spirit was "on board" as well? Hhmmmm...

For me John 3:16 arrives. Sentence 2. John says: "He ('one greater than I [sentence 1]) will baptize you (all of you) with the Holy Spirit" and with fire." (A fire that cleanses the soul.)

Is it possible then, that this Baptism of the Holy Spirit reveals the Truth that we are now unified with the Triune God? And, though many scholars debate whether this Baptism is a "moment in time", accomplished by some action (laying on of hands, coming forward to receive, etc.), is it rather the acceptance of the timeless possibility of being "refreshed by the Holy Spirit and enabled to utilize the gifts God has provided to you personally to be used for His purposes and glory? Consequently

then, to utilize these gifts is to encourage believers in their walk while inviting others to join in the walk.

This topic is immense. Too immense for one devotional "moment," in time! Be invited to read His Word for "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit" in specific along with the writings of others (consider the works of R.C. Sproul in specific).

To close, AS mentioned above, I had little in my youth that led me forward to the greater truths of God, even as I was taught to believe in Him. So study has been my trail (trial) forward. How about you? The study of this topic has led me to believe that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit reveals the union with the triune God, the existence of the Holy Spirit gifts He bestows, the possibilities that are wide in range and depth of what these gifts are, and that, when discovered and put to use, each of us can have a mighty and lasting impact for His purposes within and beyond the Christian community. GO FOR IT!

And, another opportunity for Prayer: Lord God of all. Reveal the presence and power of your Holy Spirit within us. Ignite in us our own desire to learn more of your presence, Holy Spirit. And teach us how your "Baptism" is accomplished and the possibilities of its use for God's purposes! Amen

35 The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Tina Langhough

In the video, R.C. references 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14 explaining the gifts of the Spirit. He dispels a long-held position that the gift of tongues is the ultimate indicator of the Holy Spirit's gifting in a person. He points out that prophecy ranks higher, and defines this kind of prophecy as "forth-telling" (words and actions that illustrate God's character) instead of foretelling (prediction of the future.) He also emphasized "the most excellent way," (Love).

I have worked as a professional body worker for 20 years. It is no wonder I have always liked the Bible passages that parallel the human body with the body of Christ. The microcosm paralleling the macrocosm. Looking at how we are gifted by God the Holy Spirit- each unique and equally important- like our body's parts, has always made sense to me. I have observed in my professional career how an injury to one seemingly small body part can cause a cascade of physical and sometimes emotional responses. Compensation patterns form from these can lead to widespread pain and dysfunction if not dealt with intentionally.

As a lifetime member of one church or another, I have seen "injury" to people that eventually cause compensation patterns that cause chronic pain and dysfunction in community. Sometimes the injury comes from a harsh word, maybe it is an injury of disuse... we just aren't actively using our gifts and participating, and sometimes it is an injury of overuse... one body part compensating for too much for too long.

The gifts Holy Spirit has given to us are many, and I would imagine they grow and evolve as we grow and mature spiritually. My takeaway from this video and dive into scriptures is that it is good to know what our gifts are and to use them. More importantly though, is the how and why we use them. "The more excellent way" is to do all things in love. Live our lives giving glory to God. To edify and encourage the person sitting in front of us that needs the love of God, the healing of Jesus through our hearts and hands. This is the importance of our gifts. Our lives as the body of Christ are to be the prophecy: the "forth-telling" of God's love and character out into a very dark and broken world.

Before you can even finish the thought in your head, "yeah, but I'm not...or yeah, but I don't..." Don't discourage yourself before you start! Of course you will fall short sometimes!! We will say or do the wrong thing at some point. We all do! Hopefully we were acting out of love when we said or did something less than perfect. That - and forgiveness - will cover a multitude of missteps. It is part of growing and maturing and getting stronger! And, YES! Whatever, "It" is for you, it may feel awkward or risky at first, BUT & AND Holy Spirit has gifted you and is with you on this adventure. He wants you to succeed in it!! You and your unique giftedness make a difference in the church, and in our world! Now suit up in the full armor of God, and get out there!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Help us to see in ourselves and others how precious and unique you made each of us. Give us enough confidence to live into your design for our lives and enough humility to always be thankful to you and rely on you for our strength and understanding. Holy Spirit please coordinate interactions where we can live out the love of Jesus that was so preciously and freely given to us. Amen.



The Holy Spirit has been nudging me to study Him and the 'Fruit of the Spirit' the past 5 years or so and with this addition of listening to R.C. Sproul teach on that subject, I realized that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is of utmost importance for the Christian to understand and study. I have learned 3 very important truths: 1) God instructs us as Christians to "Walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16) and to be "led by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:18). 2) Others will know we are Christians by our Fruit! Also, we can tell a 'false teacher' by their fruit! Yes, there is good and bad fruit! 3) As Christians, we will be judged at the 'Judgment seat of Christ' by how much Fruit we have borne in our Christian life through our obedience of being led by the Spirit of God.

The main Scripture that describes the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is Galatians 5:22: But the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

The importance of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' in the Christian's life? We are born into a world that the Bible says is "under the control of the evil one". We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and become a Christian, and the greatest manifestation of our progress in the things of God will be the very evidence of these 'fruits' radiating from our lives! However, there will be a great battle! A war within all Christians, to put away the 'old corrupt self' (Ephesians 4:22-24), be renewed by The Spirit and become more and more like Christ! It is for good reason that before sharing the 'Fruit of the Spirit' in (Galatians 5:22) Paul talks about the 'acts of the sinful nature' see (Galatians 5:19-21). This is the great war of the Christian life. The Apostle Paul himself struggled greatly with this war! (Romans 7:15) I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do Romans 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

So then, how do we win this battle? Well, I know you can't mention Scripture in Romans 7 without also sharing Romans 8!! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! (verse 1). The Spirit who gives life has set us free from sin. (verse 2). Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (verse 5). The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." You see, we CAN'T do this on our own merit, we can't just muster it up! We must have a personal relationship with Christ who loves us enough to MOVE RIGHT INTO OUR VERY BEING!

My short prayer is that we cry "Abba, Father." That we take the Holy Spirit seriously, talk to him constantly, read His Living Word and listen to His promptings and He will transform us and set us free!



Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,' and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats." They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came on people and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not.

Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, ¹⁹ the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said. Exodus 8:16-19

Satan vs God: Satan loses

The Bible definition for miracle is a divine act unexplainable by laws of nature. Example: Severed limb regrowing, life from death, something from nothing. All these things can be done by God <u>only</u> and not by man or by the world without God's authority or someone with God's authority.

Day by day we witness a miracle of creation by the landscape of the world. The trees, lakes, rivers etc. ... God's creation is a miracle. Something from nothing. In my life I haven't seen a miracle yet, but I'm a patient man, one can only hope.

Prayer: Lord on high, give us the wisdom to live our lives by your commands and not be tricked into following the ways of the world. Reign over us and show us your way, the only way. In Jesus name. Amen.

A good candidate for a miracle is the emergence of man. Shaped by an evolution lasting billions of years one is astounded by the apparent jump in quality. Man's intellectual, spiritual and emotional capacities are so completely different from what evolution has otherwise produced through natural selection. What selection pressure has produced the ability to think up a theory of special relativity, or the ability to compose an orchestral symphony?

- C.S. Lewis, Miracles (John-Erik Stig Hansen)

F. Salvation (Soteriology)

For the glory of God



so·te·ri·ol·o·gy

/sōˌtirēˈäləjē/

soteria – salvation logos – logic of or study of

God's activities in bringing humans into a right relationship with God and with one another through Jesus Christ. They are saved from the consequences of their sin and given eternal life. Biblical images of salvation vary widely.

Includes the study of regeneration, faith, justificacion, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.

The means of salvation: the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ differ from salvation itself. Salvation is the action of God to reconcile, redeem, and renew the created order in Jesus Christ.

"[Repentance] means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into... It means killing part of yourself, under-going a kind of death."

— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity



What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. Romans 9:14-16

Grace is benefit unearned.

I believe that many have trouble understanding the definition of grace, so I thought I'd give the short definition which I give to my kids: Grace is benefit unearned. Based on past experience (and no offense meant to the reader's intelligence) I'm going to assume that you didn't take my full meaning, so I'm going to say it again for emphasis: *Grace is benefit unearned*. Unearned means that nothing was done to deserve it.

It's easy to forget grace when we see strangers in pain. It's easy to wonder "how did they get there?" We (as humans) have a tendency to think that help must be earned, but that's not why God granted us His grace. He granted us grace, so that His grace could be spread and shown through us.

I'd also like to remind the reader to show grace to themselves. During a talk with my kids about what it meant to be addicted, I likened it to being in a trap. And I said, "Like most traps, you may need help getting out of it. Nobody stuck in a tiger trap is going to turn down help and say, 'I got myself into this tiger trap, so I need to get myself out." Whether trapped in addiction or depression, it's easy to think that we don't need help, but that's not what God wants. Show yourself grace by accepting grace from others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to not limit Your grace. Help us to learn to identify Your grace in our everyday lives, and to be free with the grace we show to others. Amen.



39 Election and Reprobation

Megan Retzlaff

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3

Ephesians 1 Romans 8-9

Again, in trying to understand God's ways, I come up against a topic I cannot comprehend. Given who God is, and who I am, I suppose this should not be surprising. Why would God not save all people, if He chooses who is saved? Or was that impossible, once we introduced Evil into the world, not because God is not powerful enough, but because we must be allowed choices? But some say that we can only choose God if He first chose us? My mind and heart are spinning. But my spirit is calm. There is sense in this, whether I can see it or not. I wish it could be otherwise, that none would suffer. God intended good for all in creating a perfect world for us. We are the ones who created the dilemma, the terrible presence of Sin in the world.

God did not create us as holy robots, but as people with our own minds, hearts, and choices. The church is to be the Bride of Christ; it is a romance! He must be chosen by us, and we must be chosen by Him.

Ephesians chapter 1 lists some of the purposes for those who are chosen by God:

- 1. Vs 4 to be holy
- 2. Vs 5 in accordance with His pleasure and will
- 3. To the praise of His glorious grace
- 4. Vs 8-10 to receive the mystery of God's will, which is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
- 5. Vs 12 in order that we might be for the praise of His glory

I cannot say that I fully agree with R.C. Sproul on the topic of Election and Reprobation. I also cannot say that I fully comprehend what the Scriptures tell me on the subject. I read, and see glimpses of what God intends, but cannot grasp it fully.

What I know is that anyone who is Saved by God is Saved by His Grace. My faith is a gift from God. I will be thankful for that Gift, and encourage others to share in it as much as possible.

I believe God to be Good, Wise, Loving, and Just. What He has done is correct. This is Trust.

Prayer: Ephesians 1:17-21, which I have changed only to say "give us" instead of "give you," etc.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give **us** the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that **we** may know him better. I pray that the eyes of **our** heart**s** may be enlightened in order that **we** may know the hope to which he has called **us**, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Amen



For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. 1 Corinthians 1:26-27

The Call

There are all kinds of calls. The call to gather people around the table, the phone calls you hope a real person might answer, the more serious call from your boss or the call from your physician. Through life, there are increasingly more compelling kinds of calls. In each of these cases, you can choose to ignore them. You can resist any of those calls and go on your way and do what you want.

Have you ever wondered about who called whom when it comes to your life with Christ? Who called first...you or Jesus?

Theologians identify this call as an *effective call*. It is the call to salvation. It is the divine summons. It is the divine subpoena, not for judgment and not for punishment, but so that you can be declared righteous, free from condemnation and most importantly forgiven. It is your call to salvation.

Most of us have heard about the gospel's *general announcement* to follow Jesus from the Bible. Jesus says, "Follow me," *thirteen times* in the New Testament. Consider for a moment, who is responsible for this 'call' in your own life? The call of Christ Jesus is different from an announcement or a general invitation to follow him. It's deeper than that.

This is about you.

The call of Jesus Christ requires a response. Until the moment of God's "appointed and accepted time," the gospel call is heard only in word or perhaps at a surface level. We know of Jesus and we may know him superficially. Some theologians identify this as 'external calling.' This is available to everyone. The doctrine of Effectual Calling puts the responsibility onto Jesus and his timing in calling someone into a life with him. I believe there is a *combined effect*. Jesus calls us specifically and we are responsible for how we respond. We have a choice how and when we respond. We can also ignore the call.

Consider your calling. Become aware of the drift—the lessening of importance. We can one day be completely and utterly devoted to Jesus Christ and the next day drift away from it all. I also believe we can consciously choose to walk away from Jesus and never return.

Prayer: Jesus, you called. Maybe I answered. Maybe I didn't. Do you want more from me? Why are you calling me? Is there something you want from me? Please speak clearly, I don't always hear well. Amen.



Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

Romans 3:20-22

No one is justified by the law in the sight of God. But there's Good News.

Fearful and trembling, it was the Philippian jailor in Acts who asked the question "What must I do to be saved?" There is no more relevant question than this: How can we be right before a Holy and Just God, for God is just and we are not. Scripture is clear as to the standard to which we are held, for Jesus himself said it in Matthew 5:48 – "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This is a standard we fallen humans simply cannot meet. We cannot earn our way to heaven. We cannot work harder to be good. We cannot try to be a good person by our own merit and expect that to satisfy God's requirements. Romans 3:20 tells us that no one will be justified in God's sight by the works of the law. We have all violated God's law and are under His just condemnation.

But I have good news for you. When we come to God in faith with our sin and failing and receive the sacrifice for sins offered by Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, God will reckon you as justified by grace in His sight. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to you (marvelous word!) and your sin and condemnation fall on the Lamb of God. God makes Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21 NRSV). And the only way to obtain this is by faith, not works. Jesus tells us, This is the only work that God wants from you: Believe in the one He has sent, (John 6:29 NLT). Sola fide – the Latin phrase for "by faith alone" is the hinge upon which everything turns. You, as a believing sinner, are declared righteous by Him. God transfers Christ's righteousness to you. It is a gift. This is the grace of God at work in you. It is by grace that you are saved through faith. Through faith, not works. You are justified in the sight of God by faith alone, (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV). This is the Good News!

Prayer: Oh Most High, how grateful we are that you have made a way for us through the work of your precious Son, Jesus Christ, so that we can be in right standing before you. Thank you, Father, that it is by faith alone we come into that right standing, because we are clearly sinners, Lord, and not worthy to be in your presence. Thank you for the saving grace that brings us from death to life in Christ! Hallelujah!



42 Saving Faith

Dick Legge

So, what do YOU think saving faith is?

Are we saved because we work hard at church by being greeters or ushers or serving on the ALB board?

Are we saved because we pray hard and volunteer when various projects at church come up? Are we saved because we tithe and donate to the food pantry and missions?

Are we saved because of our works or are we saved because of our faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross and the works are a byproduct of our saving faith?

Now somewhere in these first four questions is the truth about saving faith.

Did you know that Jesus liked to answer questions put to Him with a question?

He did this many times in the Bible. He liked to make the people asking the questions think or go a little deeper into the subject matter.

What is Faith anyway? How does the world define it?

Well the Websters new World Dictionary defines Faith as – Confidence- Belief or Trust in something. The word Trust is defined as a firm belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability in another person or thing.

The Bible (God's Holy Inspired Word) defines faith in the Book of Hebrews 11:1-3 as- Now <u>faith</u> is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

By faith we believe in God and that His Holy and inspired Word (Bible) is true.

We place our trust in Him and His Word alone.

Romans 3:23 reminds us we are all sinners in need of salvation.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 5:8 reminds us of God's great love for each of us.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 6:23 reminds us that death through sin separates us from God but eternal life comes by trusting Jesus Christ.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 10:9-10 has the answer to what is saving faith.

that if <u>you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised</u>
<u>Him from the dead, you will be saved.</u> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and <u>with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.</u>

Saving Faith is more than just a fact, it's also an act.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition God requires for salvation.

We are saved by faith through God's Grace.

Let's Pray: O heavenly, merciful Father. We thank you for your mercy, grace and love.

We thank You Lord for making it so easy to receive that eternal gift of salvation through Your Son and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by simply confessing with our lips and believing in our hearts that Jesus is Your Son. That He lived and died for our salvation and arose again on that third day and now sits at your right hand as our intercessor and one day Judge. Amen!



43 Adoption and Union with Christ

Pastor Jen Wilson

You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15 CEB

Father is not a word used to describe the relationship between God and his people in the Old Testament. Jesus initiated a whole new understanding with his relationship with God as *Father*. The Apostle John captured intimate snapshots of the relationship between Jesus and his Father throughout his gospel. Here are a few: stating from the beginning that Jesus and the Father are one (John 1:1). Jesus told his disciples that he did what his Father would do (John 5:19). Jesus came down from heaven to fulfill his Father's will (John 6:38). And, in keeping Jesus' commands, followers would abide in Jesus' love as He lived in his Father's love (John 15:10).

Demons confirmed Jesus' sonship (Mark 3:11, Mark 5:7; Luke 4:41, Luke 8:28). The Father states his pleasure and claims his Son plainly at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). The Father confirms his Son, Jesus, again at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35). The disciples confirmed Jesus as Christ, Son of God (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9). So, maybe you can imagine the *garment-ripping angst* for the Jewish officials and religious leaders when they asked him directly: are you the Christ, the Son of God? Jesus responded with: "It is as you said." (Matthew 26:64).

Adoption: a legal matter of divine inheritance

The word 'adoption' is used five times in the Bible by the Apostle Paul: Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 9:4; Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 8:15, and 8:23. Adoption—the Greek word *huiothesia* —was a common part of family life in the Mediterranean world of Jesus' time. It meant legally "to make [someone] a son." Paul used adoption as a Christian to describe a change of status from an existence outside the family and Father-lessness to a status of belonging to a new family or community.

In 42 B.C., the legal machinations of the Roman government declared Julius Caesar formally as a god: *the divine Julius*. His legal adopted son, Octavian, also known as Augustus, thus became known as *divi Iuli filius*, son of the divine Julius or simply *divi filius* or the son of the god. Augustus inherited the Roman empire as a legal son.

Consider God's will as a legal document made long before we were born. When someone dies and there is no living spouse, survivors receive the estate through inheritance. Not only did the death of Jesus Christ fulfill the requirements for salvation. Jesus' death made it possible for us to share in his inheritance as children of our Father God. (Acts 20:32; Romans 4:13-14; Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 1:14-18; Colossians 3:24; Titus 3:5-7)

Prayer: You thought of me long before I believed in you. Heavenly Father, you made my inheritance possible and Jesus' death made it legal. Thank you for preparing a legitimate place for me in your kingdom. Amen.



44 Sanctification

Gerry Fosdal

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

Philippians 2:12-13

Justification is an act. A one-time deal where the sacrificial death of Christ saves us from our sins, and gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, and the promise of eternal life. It happens when we put our trust in the finished work of Christ alone and nothing we have done.

Sanctification is a process. It begins at the very moment we trust in Christ's work on the cross, and is a lifelong journey. Since we are sealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit, our lives now seek direction, from what we are, to what God wants us to be. Our desires change as we start to seek and hunger after His righteousness. Although Christ died for our sins, we are still by nature sinners and struggle with the flesh. It is through this struggle to become more Christlike we realize that only by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God can we have victory.

R.C. Sproul pointed out in scripture **OUR part** as well as **GOD'S part** in our Sanctification.

As we continue on our journey let us live **CORAM DEO**, which is Latin for:

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF GOD, AND

TO THE HONOR AND GLORY OF GOD

"Dozens of people go to Him [God] to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of (like cowardice) or which is obviously spoiling daily life (like bad temper). Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment. That is why He warned people to "count the cost" before becoming Christians. "Make no mistake," He says, "if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect — until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less."

- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity



45 Perseverance of the Saints

Jeff Boshart

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Hebrews 2:11

We may think of "sainthood" as an elite classification that is reserved for those who make extraordinary sacrifices or do almost superhuman things in the service of our Lord. That may be true, and I've met a few followers of Jesus who have lived lives who fit that profile.

One that comes to mind was an itinerant preacher, pastor St. Louis, whom I met in Haiti many years ago. He was a man with no discernable income or means of supporting himself. Taking only his bicycle, he would wander through the rocky, dusty, paths of rural mountain villages in Haiti, bull horn in hand, sharing the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ, and relying completely on the kindness of strangers for food and lodging. This faithful preacher was responsible for planting at least five churches. He not only brought lost souls to Christ; he also was touched by their physical poverty.

Through his efforts and perseverance, these communities were visited by teams of doctors, nurses, agronomists, veterinarians, and community development specialists who built water systems to improve the health of village residents.

Pastor St. Louis died some years ago and is remembered by village elders who can still tell stories of him. Often lost in these stories is the role of the families in each village who invited him into their homes and offered him hospitality.

Maybe we won't be called to do the incredibly difficult, saintly acts, like pastor St. Louis, but we can certainly be obedient to the nudging of the Holy Spirit to do the simple things like offering "hospitality to strangers" (Hebrews 13:2) or a "cup of cold water in Christ's name" (Matthew 10:42). So, whether saintly or simple, faithful acts require both perseverance and obedience.

Hebrews 13:7 says, *Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.* For if we do, our sacrifices will not be in vain, for *God is pleased.* (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Prayer: Transforming God, I remember the saints. I remember their incredible contribution in this world for the Kingdom. So many of the people who make the list are people we often do not see. Saints tend to be people in the background or people who do small things with great love. Lord, in your mercy, show me how to be humble, help me put aside my will to fulfill your will. Empower me to do what I do with your great love today. Amen.

G. Nature, Function, and Mission of the Church (Ecclesiology)



For the glory of God

ec·cle·si·ol·o·gy

/ə klēzē aləjē/

ecclesia or "church" "logic of or study of"

The New Testament presents various images of the church that the early church struggled with as it sought its self-understanding in the light of the gospel and controversies.

Church is a community of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament church is used in a limited sense for local communities and in a universal sense that includes all believers.

In such a fearful world, we need a fearless church

— C. S. Lewis



46 Biblical Images of the Church

Pastor Jen Wilson

Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. Matthew 16:18 NLT

Jesus used *ekkelsia* or *ecclesia* or church to describe what his gatherings would be called in Matthew's gospel. The Greek term *ekklesia* has a powerful connection with the Greek term *kaleo* which means *to call* and *kurios* or *Lord*. In the secular world, ekklesia was a political term which meant an assembly of citizens who lived in a city-state.

Church: influence, insurrection and persecution?

Rome: Not many of us consider the church as threatening to the established order of government. But, in Jesus' day and during Paul's influence throughout the first century, there was a governmental crack-down on any organized group that recruited or operated contrary to the rules of the Roman governing authority.

Jerusalem: There were also many Zealot groups with "messiahs" promising to overthrow the Jewish government. Jesus happened to be one of many. Simon, the Zealot, (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18, Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13) was selected as one of Jesus' disciples. Barabbas, (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19) who was released instead of Jesus during the Roman trial, was part of a murderous, insurrectionist group.

There were many groups within Judaism that were sick and tired of the way things were and wanted revolution and change. John the Baptist referred to the religious authorities as a 'brood of vipers,' (Matthew 3:7; Matthew 12:34; Matthew 23:33). John clearly made political statements which cost him his life (Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9). There were those who were looking for the beginning of the Messianic Age at the birth of Jesus: Simeon-Luke 2:25-35; Anna-Luke 2:36-38 and Zachariah-Luke 1:67-77.

A Bride worth dying for. Scholars have ninety-six different images of the church in the New Testament. The most vibrant is the Bride of the bridegroom, Jesus Christ, that waits for the Wedding Banquet and the consummation of the age. (Matthew 9; Matthew 25; Matthew 28:25; Mark 2:19-20; John 3:29; Ephesians 5; Hebrews 9:24-26; Revelation 19:7-9)

Visible and Invisible: not always pretty, not always right...but always loved. The Church is the Body of Christ with many diverse parts, gifted by the Holy Spirit to do the will of God and to become an intersection where the world can come into contact with the holiness of God, the Truth about Jesus and the Kingdom of God. The Church is meant to be a collection of diverse peoples.

Prayer: Jesus, come to the hurting church—your beloved bride—love her unconditionally no matter what the circumstances, and undeservedly. Help us be better. Help us repair that which is broken. Without you, Jesus, the church is lost, without the Love of the Savior who died to save her. Forgive us. Amen



47 The Church: One and Holy *Peg Korth*

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. Acts 20:28

The true church is not a structure, a building, but the church is the <u>people of God</u>. We worship in a building called a church, our meeting place, but all who make up the body of believers are the church.

The Scripture that comes to mind is 1 Peter 2:5, "And now you are <u>living stones</u> being used to build a <u>spiritual house</u>. You are also a group of <u>holy priests</u> so <u>come to Him</u> (<u>you who are acceptable to Him</u> because of <u>Jesus Christ</u> and <u>offer to God those things that please Him</u>."

As a child being brought to church, I reveled in the majesty of the pipe organ and the cathedral ceiling. The Resurrected Jesus floating on a cloud above the altar and the stained-glass windows with Bible scenes all added to the uniqueness of the church. Giving Glory to the Risen Lord, singing hymns and praises to God, prayers to the Creator of the Universe.

Oh Holy church – only God is Truly Holy, but we the people have the opportunity to have the indwelling of the <u>Holy Spirit</u>, the <u>Comforter</u> Jesus said He would send. When we ask forgiveness of sin and ask Jesus to come into our hearts, the very presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit enters. The Holy one True God. Ephesians 4:5-6 *One LORD, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.*

Prayer: El Shaddai (All-Sufficient One), we surrender all to you, to glorify Your Name and bring the multitude to Believe, Honor, and OBEY. Amen.



48 The Church: Catholic and Apostolic

Pastor Jen Wilson

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22 NIV

Big idea: the Church doesn't belong to us-it belongs to Christ.

The Church's creedal tradition developed over the centuries in response to heresies such as Gnosticism, Marcionism, Docetism, and Arianism. Over a number of decades in the fourth century the Nicene Creed fostered a widespread unity in the church that was grounded in the truth of Scripture.

The creed uses careful language when it states "we believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." First, these statements affirm the Church is essential. While the Church has never been a pure or perfect instrument, the creed acknowledges it is the chosen instrument to which all belong who believe in Jesus the Christ and seek to follow him as Savior and Lord. Furthermore, the Church is purposefully communal and intended to fulfill Christ's mission. We should never ignore or refuse to challenge its inadequacies and its complicity in evil, but we must also embrace the witness of its story and the testimony to it in the Scriptures.

Unity is emphasized in the Nicene Creed by first declaring our need to be *one* Church. This imagery corresponds to the oneness of the Trinity. Such oneness is diversity-in-communion. It does not demand uniformity. It does, however, affirm Paul's message that each should be *thinking the same way, having the same love, being united and agreeing with each other,* (Philippians 2:2). The Scriptures provide the anchor for such oneness. The call to be *holy* means the Church must witness to the power and presence of the risen Lord Jesus. We should embody a difference from the world that can be seen and replicated. The struggle with this call to holiness is perhaps the greatest cause of disunity within the Church.

We confess that the Church is *catholic* according to the definition of the word: worldwide or universal. It is neither bound to the authority of the Roman Catholic papacy, nor is it merely a federation of *local* congregations. It is a reminder of the Church's unity in orthodoxy despite varied locations, languages, ethnicities, races, or denominations.

Prayer: Eternal Lord who is above time and space, when we say, "the holy catholic and apostolic Church" it reminds us that we are members of a body of believers extending across time and many lands. May our vision be a true revelation of what you desire on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



49 Worship in the Church

Emily Klingbeil

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. Psalm 63:2-4

You and I Were Made to Worship... The chorus of the Chris Tomlin song comes to mind as I sit and listen, preparing to write this devo. Made to worship...

Worship - one who is worthy. To worship is to honor. How do we honor someone? I think of someone like my Grandpa Duane, who passed away 2 years ago. The most generous man I've ever known. He worked really hard to provide for his family, set them up for a prosperous future and discreetly gave away who knows how many thousands of dollars to people trying to make the world better... teachers, scholarship funds, etc. He was a great man who I deeply respect. Honoring him for me, means living like him, bringing to life those wonderful attributes that he embodied and doing it in his memory.

But how much greater is God our Creator... And how much more are we Christians called to honor... to worship the Living God... We are made to worship.

In John Chapter 4 it says that true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth. Other places talk about bringing a sacrifice of praise. Hebrews talks about worshiping with reverence and awe. Other verses speak of music, song, thanksgiving, with lips that glorify. Psalm 63:3 says *because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.* If I desire to be generous in the name of my sweet grandpa to honor him, how much more am I called to be in the name of the Lord?

Church... We sing songs thinking that it's worship... And it is... But worship is so much more. Our every act of love, of sacrifice, of thanksgiving done in the name of the Lord, done for HIS glory is an act of worship. An opportunity to Honor our Creator... the Living God who is most worthy of our praise, most worthy of our Worship.

Lift up your hands, lift up your life, your love, your everything... in the name of the Lord. For He is Worthy!!

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things. Rev. 4:11

Prayer: Worthy Almighty God, Lord, we honor you with our lives. May our every word and action give you glory and be an act of worship to You. Open our eyes to the people around us. Show us how to live like you. Bring us opportunities to walk with your feet, serve with your hands and love with your heart. All in your name. All for your glory. We praise you and thank you. We lift up our hands and our hearts to you in worship. Fill us with your spirit and power. May our hearts and our worship honor you and bring you glory!



50 The Sacraments of the Church Megan Retzlaff

The Sacraments of the Church are rituals by which we as physical beings are given a physical representation of how we interact with the spiritual, or a natural representation of how we interact with the supernatural.

Matthew 26:26-29 – Communion 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – Communion Matthew 28:18-20 – Baptism Colossians 2:12 - Baptism James 5:13-18 – Anointing the Sick or Dying Genesis 2:18-25 – Marriage Matthew 19:4-6 – Marriage Ephesians 5:31-33 - Marriage

The Tabernacle and the Temple were intended to be physical imitations of the heavenly realms (Hebrews 8:5). To me it seems that one purpose of the Sacraments is to physically imitate some aspects of our relationship with God. Different Christian groups recognize different sacraments, most including Baptism and Communion, and others adding some or all of the following: Confirmation, Anointing the Sick or Dying, Confession, Marriage, and Holy Orders/Ordination (becoming a clergyperson).

Each sacrament has deep meaning, but here is an attempt at a quick summary for each. Also see the Scripture passages above for some.

Baptism imitates our being washed clean from our sins, and if we are immersed in water, we add the image of the old self being "dead" and "buried," as Christ was killed and buried for our sin, while the new self rises, just as Christ rose.

Communion, also known as The Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist, reminds us of the physical reality of Christ's death, his body and blood, and that we claim that death as part of our story as well, as atonement for our sins.

Confirmation is a time during adolescence when students confirm or reconfirm their faith publicly as they enter adulthood.

Anointing the Sick or Dying is prayer and application of oil to those who are ill, with prayer for recovery, or for those who are dying, with prayer over the end of life, and a final statement of faith before death. The oil is a physical reminder of the soothing, healing, and cleansing presence of God.

Confession is a formal activity in some Christian traditions, of "officially" telling a clergyperson your sins, after which they may suggest an activity or prayer for you to perform as penance. Speaking the sins aloud can give a feeling of relief or closure, can help us to "own" them, and the clergy in this case is clearly is a physical stand-in for God, reminding us that we are confessing to a higher being.

Ordination or Holy Orders is easily envisioned as the formal ceremony of coming to "work for God," perhaps like signing a contract or shaking the boss's hand upon being hired. All Christians of course serve God, but a clergyperson does so as their primary vocation.

Marriage is not included on a list of sacraments in many churches, but to me it seems the next most likely to include, after Baptism and Communion. Marriage on earth between humans is a copy and a shadow of the relationship of Christ to the Church, as the Church is His Bride. Spouses are to love, serve, respect, and care for each other. They are to be committed to each other without reserve.

These sacraments are imitations of the spiritual reality, physical reminders and touchpoints for us to focus on in order to feel a greater connection.

Particularly in the case of marriage, there is a lot of responsibility put on a person to represent aspects of our relationship with God. Of course as fallen men and women, we will not succeed fully, consistently. But we commit to continue trying. I like these lyrics as a description of Christian marriage and how the spiritual is intertwined with our human frailty:

"Don't be scared, it's alright
It's a weight you are not meant to shoulder
But you bear so much light
And it's brighter each day we get older
And I know that you're broken too
But you are a sacrament
God has spoken through
He's spoken through you"
Andrew Peterson, "My One Safe Place," Album: The Burning Edge of Dawn

Prayer: God, when I experience the physical imitations of the spiritual in Holy Sacraments, let me at times, humbly, momentarily, peek behind the veil. Let me open myself to the spiritual, if You will allow me to see glimpses of it. Amen



He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5

Baptism is a sacrament I hold dear. Be it infant baptism where parents and sponsors show a unity of support to raise a child in the nurture and admonition of the LORD or youth and adult baptism where the person is being baptized in obedience to understanding that Jesus died for their sins and they have a repentant heart to follow the ways of our Lord Jesus. To wash away the old life and begin the NEW.

The 3 Scriptures that come to mind are:

- 1) Acts 2:38 Repent and be baptized.
- 2) John 1:32-35 John said 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven in the form of a dove and rest on Him, and God sent me to baptize with water and told me you will see the <u>Spirit</u> come down and rest on a man, <u>He</u> is the <u>One</u> who will <u>baptize</u> with the <u>Holy Spirit</u>.
- 3) 1 Peter 3:21 And that water is like baptism that now saves you, the promise made to God from a good conscience.

I got baptized as a baby and then chose later to be baptized as an adult to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, as He was baptized at 30 and went into the work of the LORD. Knowing God as my Lord, SAVIOR, Redeemer, and friend, I accepted Jesus into my heart when I was in college with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. I asked Jesus to be my Lord at a Sandy Brown Revival in Texas in 1979.

Prayer: Lord Emmanuel (God with us), show us Your Way, Your Path, Your Desire for our lives and may we respond, Yes Lord, I will follow. Amen.

Whatever you do, he will make good of it. But not the good he had prepared for you if you had obeyed Him.

-C. S. Lewis, "Ransom," in Perelandra



It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. John 13:1-3

Oh what wonderful fellowship of the saints to partake of the Lord's supper together in remembrance of what the Lord did for us, taking upon Him the sins of the world. The Lord knew we are a people who forget quickly and easily. We need to be reminded of His Sacrifices.

The Scripture that comes to mind is:

1 Corinthians 11:24-26 He took the bread and gave thanks for it. Then He broke the bread and said 'This is My Body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember Me.' In the same way Jesus took the cup. He said 'This cup is the new covenant that is sealed with the blood of my death. When you do this, do it to remember me. Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are telling others about the Lord's death until He comes.'

In the Lutheran church, wine is used in the cup, in many Protestant churches "new wine" is used (grape juice). I do prefer the grape juice and the bread or wafer to represent the Body. We are a people who forget easily. To do the Lord's Supper at the beginning of the month is a good way to start each month. Remember what Jesus did for us. He gave His life so that we might be forgiven of our sins. He took the sins of the world upon His body. <u>Each</u> and <u>every</u> person should be so grateful for the shedding of Jesus Blood that we might live a cleansed life, a forgiven life, when we believe.

Prayer: Jehovah-Jireh (The Lord Will Provide), You LORD have provided the LAMB of God for the Sacrifice of sin. May we repent and walk boldly toward the future, giving You the glory. Amen.

"I hope I do not offend God by making my Communions in the frame of mind I have been describing. The command, after all, was Take, eat: not Take, understand."

— C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer

H. Last Things (Eschatology)



For the glory of God

es·cha·tol·o·gy

/ eskə täləjē/

- 1. The part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind.
- 2. The study of 'last things',' the end of the world. Theological dimensions include the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the last judgment.

Your place in Heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it.

- C.S. Lewis



53 Death and the Intermediate State

Jeanette Retzlaff

Have you ever wondered what our last days of life on earth will be like? What happens to us when we die? Eschatology is the study of the last days and our future hope of redemption.

Luke 23:43 I Corinthians 15:35-58

The question of: "What happens to us when we die?" really came to my mind 47 years ago when our first son Andrew was stillborn. Then within the next 2 years I gave birth to our 2 sons, Dan and Richard. Having 2 healthy and active boys to raise, there wasn't much time to think about death and Heaven during the next 20+ years. Thirteen years ago this question came back to me when my husband Pete died. I will add that over the past 50+ years I have played the organ at many funerals. In listening to the Pastors' funeral sermons, I heard that the deceased was 'more alive' now than they were before they stopped breathing. They were with Jesus in Heaven and worshiping Him. The scripture referred to is Luke 23:43. One of the two criminals being hung with Jesus, asked Him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom". Jesus told him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise." My thought was that sounds wonderful – we go right to Heaven when we die. But then there was scripture about the Rapture, when our bodies would arise thru the air to Heaven. This caused some confusion in my mind. That is why I chose this topic for the devotional. I wanted to learn more from the scripture.

It was a meaningful lesson for me to listen to from R.C. Sproul and to learn from him.

- 1) Our soul which is our mind, thoughts, who we really are goes directly to Heaven to be with Jesus.
- 2) Our physical bodies the earthly home for our souls decays in the ground or is burned but will be brought back together and become a new glorified body for our souls at the Rapture. I Corinthians 15:35-58. How? That is God's Promise, but also His Mystery.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians sees dying for Christ as gain. Being alive and sharing the work of Jesus is "good," but dying and going home to be with Jesus is "far better". Most Christians do not fear death but do fear dying because there could be some terrific pain. There is a song, "Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven, But Nobody Wants to Die!" I heard it sung by Mark Lowry with the Bill & Gloria Gaither Homecoming Group.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for loving me so much that you even have plans for my Eternal future. Help me to grow in my understanding of your remembrance of me. Amen.



54 The Resurrection *Lisa Kalata*

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58

Good news friends, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is real, and resurrection is real for us too!

What do you associate the word *Resurrection* with? For me, a lot of things come to mind like the death of Jesus. Death is a hard subject on its own, but then put it in the perspective of losing a loved one and what that truly means. This may be overwhelming and hard for some but if you are a Christian believer in Jesus Christ our Savior, this gives comfort. This is the part where we should be jumping for joy, as we will have eternal life with the resurrection of our own bodies to be given a glorified body to live with our heavenly father for eternal life.

This is what has given me comfort in the mourning of my mother-in-law. This is reassurance that I will see her again in a glorified body not the broken body that she left in this earthly life. That is like receiving a hug from Jesus. Philippians 1:21 *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

The apostle Paul preached the good news of victory over sin through the saving effect of Christ's death by crucifixion and of this triumph over death in his resurrection, this can be found in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15. The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Christianity. It provides the physical, historical, space-time verification for the faith. Without it, Christianity is quite literally dead. The resurrection of Christ is proclaimed vigorously throughout the New Testament, especially in the teachings of Paul. It is primarily because of Paul's teachings that the resurrection has such a substantial place in Christianity.

The Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection secured, sealed, and consummated His redemptive work. Through his work we have forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14) an eternal inheritance (Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 1:12), and the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5) and we know we will share in the benefits of Christ's resurrection and victory with our own resurrection. This is the great hope of Christians. Christ's appearing is our resurrection and our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

Prayer: Resurrecting God, your power was revealed in what you have already done in Jesus and what you promise to accomplish in the future for each of us who believe. One day we will all be raised alive in glory! This is really good news! Amen.



55 The Kingdom of God Pastor Jen Wilson

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10

I wandered around within the hallowed sanctuary of Notre Dame in Paris for several hours in awe and wonder. How could such a structure even be built? Who paid for it? The intricacies and engineering seemed *other-worldly*. A cathedral designed to make an impression. Grand. Spectacular. Inspiring. A building to be the intersection where heaven meets earth.

There are **certain spaces** on this planet that are sacred. Geographic locations are identified as spiritually significant. Bible characters like Abraham (Genesis 12:8), Isaac (Genesis 26:25), or Jacob (Genesis 35:7-11), stop everything to consecrate stones to make an altar to God. Moses was tasked with creating a tabernacle in the Wilderness to be a temporary dwelling place for God to be near his people (Exodus 40). King David decided that God needed a house to live in as grand and beautiful as his palace (2 Samuel 7). His son, Solomon, built and finished the first Temple (2 Chronicles 7). God intended for us to live with and near him from the beginning. There was no separation between God, Adam, and Eve. They lived together in perfection (Genesis 1 & 2). They worked, they enjoyed one another and Creation, and then they rested (Genesis 1:2).

Sin separated us from God. Sin infected everything including the ability for humans to be with God. Two distinct locations were developed: *within* the presence and *outside* the presence of God. Separate locations. But, every once in a while, we would get a hint of what it was like to be with God in his presence, living and serving in his eternal kingdom.

There is both a present and a future tone to this. Jesus who is the Messiah and Christ, is God's promised leader, king, authority and Savior. He already presently reigns as the supreme leader of heaven. But, because of the sin separation, Creation groans with anticipation of when all things will be made right, whole, perfect, and new and Jesus will reign over both Heaven and Earth as well (Romans 8:22; Revelation 21:5).

Listen to what Jesus tells his disciples: In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-4 NKJV). Heaven is a legitimate location, a holy space where Jesus reigns and we live with him forever. God allows time for us to work toward God's goals of building His kingdom as intersections of grace here among us on earth. It's not always brick and mortar—it's heart and soul—blood, sweat and tears. Kingdom here prepares us for Kingdom there...forever.

Prayer: King of heaven, reign in me. Let me serve the greatest kingdom with honor and dignity. Awaken my soul to the reality of Heaven and allow its vision to inspire me to reach others with the truth of the gospel. Amen.



56 The Millennium

Megan Retzlaff

The Millennium is a thousand-year period discussed in Revelation chapter 20, during which Satan will be bound and restricted, and certain faithful ones and martyrs will rule alongside Christ.

... He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel. Genesis 3:15

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come. Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. Revelation 22:20-21

Revelation 20

The End Times, and particularly the Millennium, are not simple to understand as presented in Scripture, no matter what view you take of precisely how and in what order they will occur. There has been much discussion in popular Christian culture about them in the last 30 years.

Few now believe that the Millennium has already happened, though at times in history it was a more popular view. This view is called Postmillennialism ("post" meaning "after").

Some believe the Millennium will be a literal thousand-year period in the future, with other dramatic End Times events described in Revelation happening before, during, or after it. This view is Premillennialism ("pre" meaning "before").

And some believe that the Millennium is not a literal thousand years, and in fact that it is already happening, as the Church Age – the time between Christ's ministry on earth and the End. This view sees Satan as being bound now, not *un*able to impact the earth, but limited. This view is called Amillennialism ("a" meaning "non," as in not a literal thousand-year period). Another name, less confusing though also less often used, is Realized Millennialism, that the Millennium is already being realized or occurring. This is the view that R.C. Sproul says in the video that he leans toward, and it is my view.

Please do not think any of us disrespectful toward God and His Holy Word, if we do not see eye to eye on this matter. All who are truly His children will indeed praise Him when we see His plan, even though some of us will surely be proven to have misunderstood. And whether you feel certain or uncertain of just how the Millennium fits into God's timeline, remember that we are not told that we must understand it, or any other particular prophecy to be saved, we just need to *believe*, to *trust in God*. It is good to try to understand, by all means that is why the prophecy was given, but we must be humble, and realize that we might not get everything correct. Keep in mind that our respected scholar and teacher R.C. Sproul also says that he has changed his views on the Millennium over the course of his Christian life, so at some point even he must have held or now be holding an incorrect view.

Whatever God has meant by the Millennium, I will praise Him for it when I see His return!

Prayer: ... Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. Revelation 22:20-21



57 The Return of Christ

Pastor Jen Wilson

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Revelation 22:7 NKJV

Controversy has been connected with this statement since Jesus Christ revealed it to John. Many believed Jesus was an influential rabbi while he was alive in the first century. Some may have recognized Jesus as the Messiah or the Son of God. Most had no idea what that meant.

Wait! There's More!

The resurrection and ascension changed everything. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost revealed that God was far from finished. The work of God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit was initiated until the final Kingdom of God would be restored sometime in the future. Over the centuries, many would claim to know when the Kingdom of God would be revealed and Jesus would return to reign and rule. Here are the Greek words:

- 1. Behold—see this revelation with spiritual sight: ἰδοὺ (idou) 200 Occurrences in the New Testament only.
- **2. I come, I have come, I am coming, I will come, I will come back:** ἕρχομαι (erchomai) 20 Occurrences in the New Testament only.
- 3. Blessed: to pronounce words in a religious rite, to confer or invoke divine favor upon; ask God to look favorably on. μακάριός (makarios) 16 Occurrences in the New Testament only.

The return of Jesus is a New Testament promise, like all promises of God. God makes promises and God fulfills them. Abraham believed God would do something during his lifetime when God shared the vision of becoming a nation and a blessing (Genesis 12).

There are many theories about Christ's return. I don't have a definitive answer for the exact timing. But we need to have an eager anticipation and expectation just as some did when the angel appeared to Mary initiating the miracle that God would intervene in human history (Luke 1 and 2). Notice the second word used above *erchomai*. One word in the Greek has so much power that it has multiple meanings.

Consider Jesus' promise. Do you have a sense of urgency that His arrival is imminent? Have you done all Jesus tasked you to accomplish? Is there an awakening that God is up to something exciting, and we would witness it in our lifetime? Let these words from Habakkuk inspire you as they have me for decades: Look at the nations and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. (Habakkuk 1:5).

Prayer: Maranatha, Lord! Come, Lord! May we be prepared for your arrival. May we be ready with eager anticipation that You will do something in our lifetime! May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



58 The Final Judgment *Pastor Jen Wilson*

They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the Lord's presence and away from his mighty glory. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 CEB

"God is dead." (1884) German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche made a declaration and there was a spirit of unprecedented optimism throughout the nineteenth century intellectual world. The "God is dead" announcement was welcomed and finally everyone could discover the truth about humanity—technology, invention and education would free humans from their belief in a supernatural deity. People would rid the world of disease, warfare, ignorance and of all the other things that plagued human beings.

"There is no hell." The concept of hell is outdated for a lot of people. Today, we have religious leaders who, like Nietzsche, make public announcements. Perhaps if we consider what Jesus taught, hell cannot be so easily dismissed. In fact, no other biblical figure speaks about hell more often than Jesus Christ himself.

Images and terms

Let's explore the different terms and images Jesus uses to describe hell and then explore what he actually says about it.

The two most common words for hell are *hades* and *gehēnna*. *Hades* was the Greek word for the realm of the dead, but Jesus uses it more specifically to refer to a place of torment (Luke 16:23), a place that is the opposite of heaven (Matthew 11:23). Originally *gehēnna* referred to Hinnom Valley—a burning garbage dump—south of Jerusalem, where centuries earlier child sacrifice was practiced (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:32). By the time of Jesus, *gehēnna* was a picture of hell, such that Jesus warns "fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell [*gehēnna*]" (Matthew 10:28).

Jesus often combines gehenna with fire, a very common image of hell. Fire communicates the horror of the place, as in Matthew 5:22 when he warns whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell [gehēnna] of fire. Another common picture of hell is darkness. Jesus warns that those who refuse to enter the kingdom of God by repentance and faith will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12).

Jesus talked about hell.

We can summarize it like this: hell is the place of conscious, eternal torment where people experience separation from God and punishment for their sin. Hell is identified as, "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41), but also for those who join them in their

rebellion against God (Matthew 11:20–24). The horror of hell is such that Jesus says, *if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire,* (Mark 9:43). For those who do not enter the narrow door of faith and repentance in Jesus (Luke 13:24), a place of weeping and gnashing teeth awaits them (Luke 13:28). There is also the haunting story Jesus shared about the request of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

Sheep and goats (and no...this is not about the Greatest Of All Time) Jesus described the end of human history as a scene where everyone will appear before him, where he will divide humanity into sheep—those with evidence they trusted Jesus—and the goats—those who did not trust in Jesus Christ. The sheep will receive eternal life, while the goats will go away into eternal punishment, (Matthew 25:46). Who really cares whether it's a burning inferno or a place of utter darkness? Why would anyone risk it?

Jesus uses strong language about hell.

For Jesus, hell is real and unspeakably horrible. Jesus not only warned of the dangers of hell, but he also offered the way out. Trusting Jesus means we accept the Truth about Jesus, who lived a life of perfect obedience, died a sacrificial death on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead to finally defeat sin and death, and promised to return to reign in his eternal kingdom. He invites everyone to trust in him to receive eternal life rather than the eternal punishment that everyone deserves for their sin (John 3:16-17).

Other scriptures that mention hell as a location, the devil or Satan, and eternal judgment: Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation.

Prayer: Author of Revelation, you communicate clearly to me the Way, the Truth and the Life and why no one goes to the Father, except through Jesus. In this moment, I humble myself before you and ask for your forgiveness. I have allowed the ideas or thoughts of others to cloud my judgment. I ask for forgiveness not only for me, but for all those who erroneously share any alternative from the Truth. Amen.



59 Eternal Punishment Pastor Jen Wilson

But he said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." Luke 16:31 NASB

"Houston, we have a problem."

Why is it so extremely important to understand what is at stake? The idea of hell is implausible to people because they see it as unfair that eternal punishment would be the pronouncement for a comparably minor offense like not embracing Christianity. Frankly, no one knows anyone—including themselves—that seems bad enough to merit eternal punishment.

Biblical teaching on these objections.

First, the Bible tells us that people get in the afterlife what they desired most-either to have Jesus as Savior and Master or to be their own Saviors and Masters (Romans 1:24-26). Secondly, it tells us that hell is a natural consequence of our own choices (Matthew 7:13-14; Proverbs 14:12; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Galatians 6:7-8; Joshua 24:15; Romans 6:23). Even in the secular world, it is clear that self-centeredness makes us miserable and blind. The more self-centered, self-absorbed, self-pitying and self-justifying people are, the more breakdowns occur relationally, psychologically, and even physically. Selfish people live in deep denial about who the source of their problems truly is!

On the other hand, a soul that has decided to center its life on God and his glory moves toward increasing joy and wholeness. We can see both of these 'trajectories' even in this life. But if, as the Bible teaches, our souls will go on forever, then just imagine how far in each direction these two kinds of souls will get in *a billion years*. When we choose to get away from God, He, in his infinite justice, allows us to go where we wanted to go.

The frightening truth about separation.

In the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus tells us of a rich man who goes to hell and who is in torment and horrible thirst because of the fire. But there are interesting insights into *what is going on in his soul.* He urges Abraham to send a messenger to go and warn his still-living brothers about the reality of hell.

The Rich Man is saying that he did not have a chance to know God or tell others. Even from hell, The Rich Man selfishly shifts the blame from making his own conscious choice to the excuse that did not have adequate information to avoid hell. Abraham says forcefully that people in this life have been well-informed through the Scriptures. Eternally living in hell, The Rich Man continued to argue and was deeply in denial. He remained angry at God, unable to admit that it was a just decision and wished he could be less miserable. But in no way... at any time... was The Rich Man willing to repent or seek forgiveness in order to be reunited with the presence of God.

C.S. Lewis describes it like this:

Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others... but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud. (The Great Divorce, 1945)

Lostness and being separated from God for eternity.

Jesus says that no *physical destruction* can be compared with the *spiritual destruction* of losing the presence of God. Jesus experienced this separation from God on the cross. Jesus was forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46). In Luke 16:24 the rich man in hell is desperately thirsty (v.24), and on the cross Jesus said "I thirst" (John 19:28). The water of life, the presence of God, was taken from him.

The point is this.

Unless we come to grips with this "terrible" doctrine, we will never even begin to understand the depths of what Jesus did for us on the cross. His body was being destroyed in the worst possible way, but that was a flea bite compared to what was happening to his soul. When he cried out that his God had forsaken him, he was experiencing hell itself. But consider—if our debt for sin is so great that it is never paid off there, but our hell stretches on for eternity, then what are we to conclude from the fact that Jesus said the payment was "finished," (John 19:30). We learn that what he felt on the cross was far worse and deeper than all of our deserved hells put together.

Moralist or Born-Again believer...?

The doctrine of Eternal Punishment is crucial—without it we can't understand our complete dependence on God, the character and danger of even the smallest sins, and the true scope of the costly love of Jesus. Remember, it is possible to stress this doctrine in unwise ways. Like the Rich Man in scripture, many people are self-absorbed and want to put all the emphasis on God's judgment and none on the self-chosen character of hell.

Ironically, this unBiblical perspective take its toll on churches and faith communities. Some can preach Eternal Punishment in such a way that people reform their lives only out of a self-interest or out of a fear of avoiding consequences. I would hope that we choose Jesus out of love and loyalty because He was the one who embraced and experienced hell in our place. The distinction between those two motives is all important. The first creates a moralist, the second a born-again believer.

Prayer: Jesus, I don't think I ever thought about hell or eternal punishment in this way—I don't want to live separated from you. I want to live eternally connected with you. This is our finest hour when we want more of you and less of this world. Forgive me of my error and set me onto the narrow path. Amen.



60 The Believer's Final Rest

Pastor Jen Wilson

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Genesis 2:1-3

In the first six days of creation, the Sovereign Lord engaged the primordial chaos and darkness over the earth (Genesis 1:2). God brought order to the chaos by means of divine commands: "Let there be..." In these six days, God worked toward an appointed goal: rest. On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done (2:2). On the seventh day, the work of creation reached its zenith. Rest was what God was working toward all along. Rest from chaos and creativity was the ultimate final goal for which all of creation was to arrive under Adam's representative government as he carried out his role to subdue and rule (Genesis 1:28). Rest! Go now and enjoy it!

Holy Rest prepares us for Ultimate Rest

Holy resting is best understood as a position of enjoyment. Imagine God and Adam at peace, enjoying all that had been accomplished after quelling the chaotic forces and creating the universe. Adam is resting and enjoying it all. God is enjoying rest in his cosmic temple. God has "blessed the seventh day and set it apart" so that his people would enjoy and commemorate his lordship, kingship, and rule over all which he had created. Blessing the seventh day, God declared the sabbath was not limited to the cessation of work or a time to sit around and do nothing. Rather, God declared the day to be a time of joyful expectation, fruitfulness, and assurance.

The seventh day was to give a grander vision for the future. The day was to be a time of receiving and enjoying benefits for life, physically, morally, spiritually, week by week. The seventh day rest was to be a reminder that even though there would be the never-ending work of chaos-quelling and creativity, there would be days of completion in the future. There would be a day of celebration for the cosmos. As God "blessed" the animals and human beings, His blessing was applied to the seventh day.

Great thinkers and scholars have struggled to explain how we will one day see God. Maybe we all secretly wonder what it will be like to see God, face to face, and to see all those who have gone before us who are part of that great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1-2). Consider what the Apostle John included about the promise of the afterlife: Jesus himself goes to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-4). Consider the description of the final rest from John: He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:4 CEB)

Prayer: A foretaste of heaven happens every time I rest and enjoy what you accomplish, Lord. I work. I struggle. I wait for that final promise with hope. Make it a reality for me. Amen.

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This devotional was lovingly prepared for you by many of your friends at Willerup Church 414 W Water St, Cambridge, WI 608-423-3777 at the request, inspiration, and encouragement of our Pastor Jen Wilson March 2022

