



CHRIST IN YOU:

Alive & Free



Published March 2018.

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Author: *Matt Smith*

Editor: *Jonathan Deatherage*

Special thanks to: *JoAnn Hummel, Donald Campbell, Pete & Libby Briscoe, Michelle Attar, Dani Smith, Timm & Kristin Sautter, Susanne Newton, David & Maureen Silko, Christopher Silko, Anthony Pratt, Eric Willis, Ronda Barney, Nate Murray.*

At Bent Tree, our tagline is “experience Life” — lower case ‘e’ for experience, because *experiences* are important, but “an experience” is not the only thing we pursue; upper case ‘L’ for Life, because the *Life of Jesus* is our, well . . . *Life!* We believe that Jesus came not only to save us through his death on the cross, but also to live within us because of his resurrection. We want people to experience that abundant Life (John 10:10), which is sourced in our union with Christ.

You’ll find that throughout this study, whenever we refer to the Life that Jesus gives, it is upper case. We want to emphasize how unique and important that Life is for all believers!



Bent Tree is a non-denominational church with campuses in Texas (Carrollton and Frisco) and Wisconsin (Milwaukee). Go to benttree.org to find out more about Bent Tree online.





Trusting in Jesus Christ as your savior is just the beginning of experiencing Christ as your source of Life. Your eternal life began the moment you received Christ and will continue into eternity. Salvation is so much more than your ticket to heaven and forgiveness of your sins — it is freedom from sin’s power over you! You’ll learn about that true freedom in this study.

When you receive Jesus as your Savior, faith opens the door and grants you full access to the vast, glorious grace upon which you now stand. Romans 5:1-2a describes it this way:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

So here you stand, friend, on the ground of grace! It’s time to walk this miraculous territory of Christ’s love for you and Life in you, which is your inheritance and identity as a believer. In these pages, you’ll discover more of what the Bible means when it speaks of our spiritual union with Jesus Christ, our new identity in him, and how we live in light of that amazing reality. As you grow in your understanding of his work on your behalf, you’ll “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

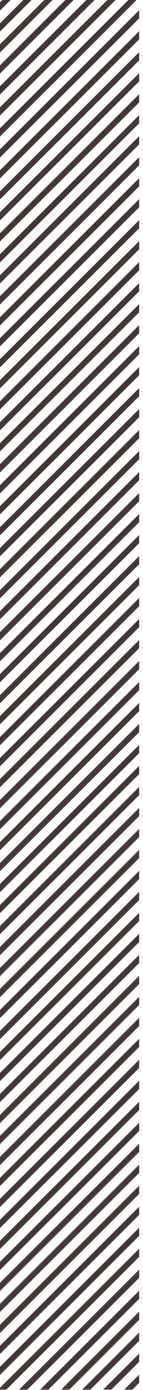
Our focus in this study is your relationship with God. That relationship, we believe, is the starting point for us and the only way we can begin to have healthy, honest relationships with others.

This study can be done on your own, but it is designed to be used in a one-on-one context or in groups of three to four people. We encourage you to be intentional about your time with this study. Each lesson has questions for you to process through on your own (Process) and questions for you to process with others (Reflect). The memory verses for each week will help you capture the main idea and direct your thoughts on truth from God’s Word. The prayer section helps to give you ideas for talking with God about the things discussed in each lesson.

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (all rights reserved), unless otherwise noted. We encourage you to have a Bible with you as you do this study and look up the verses, even if they are written out already.

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,
but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body,
I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and
gave himself for me.”*

Galatians 2:20



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Even in the most hopeless situations, hope can be found. The problem for every human is this: We are born sinners. This is revealed throughout Scripture, and is clearly stated in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” At this point, we are “in Adam” — spiritually separated from God, just as our ancestor Adam became at the Fall (see Genesis 3). In this state, we are unfit for heaven, since heaven is perfect and is reserved for those who are perfect. More so, life on earth is riddled with pain and confusion, since anyone “in Adam” is ruled by sin and cannot walk in God’s way of healing, truth, and peace.

Sin shows itself in a rejection of God’s standard for living, as expressed in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). The root of sin is denying that God is good and knows what is best. Anyone in this state is unable to be in an intimate relationship with God because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Here, “death” is not merely physical, but refers to the state of being spiritually separated from God, the author of Life. Without Life, heaven is out of the question, and life on earth will be empty (1 John 5:12).

But there is hope! Jesus Christ died on the cross two thousand years ago to deal with sin and rose again to bring us Life! Anyone can come to find Life in him through faith in his sacrifice (John 1:12). His death on the cross was the perfect payment for our sins (Heb. 10:10).

If you trust in him to be your source of forgiveness before God, then your sins — past, present, and future — are eradicated (Rom. 3:25), and you are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19)! This is a simple act of belief. It can be done right where you are now. This prayer might help:

Jesus, thank you for paying for my sins on the cross. I need your forgiveness. I believe in you to be my source of Life and salvation. I admit that I could never do anything to make myself right before God. I receive the free gift you gave me — Christ’s perfect Life for mine. Amen.

You are now forgiven before God! More than that, you have been made new from within (2 Cor. 5:17), you have complete access to the throne of God (Heb. 4:14-16), and you have been set free from the power of sin (Rom. 6:14)!





by Pete Briscoe

In January 2017, I celebrated 25 years of pastoring Bent Tree. And I would no longer be in ministry if I had not learned what I'm about to tell you. I would have quit a few years ago. But God taught me something that's the most encouraging thing I've ever learned about myself. And it will be the most encouraging thing you'll ever learn about yourself, too.

If you hear it, believe it, and own it, it can take the pressure away. You can start to enjoy the Christian life.

In his book "Scandalous Freedom," Steve Brown tells the story of his daughter, Robin. Robin was in an AP English class in high school, and after the first two days, she was freaking out because it was so hard. So, she told her dad, "I've got to get out; I can't do this class."

Steve took her to talk to the teacher, who, through Robin's tears told her, "I really want you in my class. Would it make a difference if I told you that I'm going to give you an 'A' right now? Would you stay in my class then?"

"Are you serious?" Robin asked, wiping a few tears away.

"I'm absolutely serious." And she opened her grade book, found Robin's name, and she wrote an 'A.' "Now, go along to class, learn, and enjoy."

Would it change the way you view the Christian life if I told you that, according to God, you already have an 'A'? You are not being graded!

In Romans 6:14, the apostle Paul says, "You are no longer under law; you are under grace."

Let me put it another way: You are no longer under *grade*; you are under *grace*. It is not a *grading* system; it is a *gracing* system.

So, where does this concept show up in the Bible? Well, in the Old Testament, it was a grading system. God gave the law – he gave the answers to the final exam. Under the grading system, all the people of Israel had to do was complete everything on the test perfectly, and they'd get an 'A.' The people of Israel tried. And failed.

Of course, this is the way God designed it, so that we'd recognize our need for the cross of Christ.

Then the cross happened. And with the cross, God declared it was no longer a *grading* system but a *gracing* system. Through the cross, Jesus was saying, "You tried to earn the 'A' and you couldn't. So I'm just going to give it to you. Just start with an 'A' and we'll work from there."

At the moment of conversion, you get your 'A.' God opens up the grade book, finds your name, and writes an 'A.' Then he says, "Go along now, learn, and enjoy."

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — **it is by grace you have been saved.** And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.** . . (Ephesians 2:5-8, emphasis added)

Grace is something you desperately need, you could never repay, and you don't deserve. Grace says there's nothing you could do to make God love you more, and there's nothing you could do to make God love you less.

God loves you perfectly right now, because his love is not based on your performance but on his character.

God is love. He cannot help himself but love you. For all who are in Christ, he has already given you an 'A.'

Notice that the good works come after the 'A' has been granted — you are living *from* your 'A,' not *for* it. That is not simply semantics, it is a completely different type of life.

When you're feeling the pressure, hear Jesus whisper into your ear, "You already have an 'A.' Run along and learn. Enjoy. The pressure is off."

Pete Briscoe

Senior Pastor | Bent Tree Bible Fellowship | 2017

Adapted from Pete Briscoe's message at the 2016 RightNow Conference.



1: NORMAL

Remember middle school? That time of transition where kids begin the treacherous journey through adolescence into adulthood. It can be hard, and many adults cringe with memories of the odd or awkward things they did at that stage. The biggest question looming in that season of life is:

“Am I normal?”

It’s a problem that plagues us well beyond middle school. It’s a question that alerts us every time we do something that falls outside the generally agreed-upon status quo of our surrounding group of friends and colleagues. We want to fit in. Though we might like having certain quirks that make us interesting or different, at the end of the day, if we’re not seen as ‘normal,’ it can be very unsettling.


God has an idea of ‘normal’ for humanity. And it has nothing to do with middle school, social norms, or personality quirks. It has everything to do with our original design.

HUMANITY BIRTHED

Let’s scroll back to Adam and Eve.

The story of creation is beautiful. In Genesis 1, God speaks the world into existence, fills it with land, water, all types of creatures, and declares it all to be *good*.

Near the end of the chapter, he does something a little different:



Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds of the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

At the end of it all, God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good* (Genesis 1:31).

Look again at the verses above. Who is the person defining what is good? In this cosmic creative act, God was defining reality, determining ‘good’ and ‘not good.’ **God, in his wisdom, was laying out his desired ‘normal.’**

In Genesis 2, we get to see a bit of a “zoomed in” picture of what God did and what it was like when he created the first people.

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*, and *the man became a living being*. . . The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” . . . So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (Genesis 2:7, 18, 21-22, emphasis added)

We see, even at the outset of creation, that God made man and woman to be relational. At this point in the creation account, the scene is perfect. So perfect that verse 25 tells us, “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Fully known, fully accepted, and without shame.

But take another look. Where did Adam’s life come from? *The breath of life* from God.

At creation, Adam and Eve experienced Life because of their connection with God, the author of Life.

Their relationship with each other and with God was intimate, peaceful, whole, and there was nothing wrong. In paradise, they lived in peace with all of creation and with their Creator. God was taking care of every need, and they were fully dependent on him. They were free from any bondage to sin. They trusted God and he proved trustworthy.

A joyful, fulfilled life of dependence on God was normal. It was ‘good.’

In this place of goodness, Adam was given the freedom of choice, as well. In the middle of the garden, God planted two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil . . . And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Genesis 2:9, 16-17)

God, who is relational, in his creative act of making humanity *in his image*, gave Adam and Eve freedom of choice in order for them to have an intimate, free, and loving relationship with him.

TREE OF LIFE



TREE OF THE
KNOWLEDGE OF
GOOD AND EVIL




What do these two trees have to do with us today? They represent two ways of living: 1) The tree of life represents a life of total dependence on God — not just for salvation but as the source of Life, and 2) The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents a life lived in independence from God, choosing yourself (or someone/something else) as your source for living.

Choosing to live off of the tree of life leads to intimacy, peace, and freedom with God and others. Choosing to live from the other tree leads to isolation, frustration, and disappointment — because you weren’t made to live independently from him.

HUMANITY BROKEN

Read Genesis 3:1-13 in your Bible now. Underline the verbs in the passage and pay close attention to what was taking place. Notice the shift here — as a result of their disobedience, Adam and Eve began acting independently from God!

The serpent’s plan was to get Eve to *doubt God’s goodness* — for when we doubt that he is good, we won’t trust him or fully depend on him. By leading Eve to believe that God wanted her to miss out on something, she began to depend on herself to determine what was ‘good’ and ‘not good’ for her. What a shift!



When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:6)

They turned away from the author and source of Life. In this moment of choosing independence from God and dependence on themselves, Adam and Eve began to experience death – spiritual separation from God – no peace, no intimacy, no security or safety. . . utter chaos.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves . . . and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:7, 8b)

They knew something wasn't right. They tried to hide. It was their attempt to save themselves. Nothing externally had changed, but suddenly they were covering themselves, hiding from each other and from God in desperation.

When God came and found them, the story only got worse:

But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:9-13)

Blame. Deflection. Self-protection. Victimization. Isolation. Everyone for themselves. These are the characteristics of those who place trust in themselves instead of in God. They are disconnected from the source of Life, *so by their words and actions they introduce death into their relationships*. No one wants this type of life.

But God continues to prove he is trustworthy and good. Even at the end of chapter 3, his heart for humanity is one of restoration, love, compassion, and rescue.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)

Adam and Eve, attempting to cover themselves, sewed together fig leaves. God gave them garments of leather. *Fig leaves*: completely incapable of covering and protecting their bodies from the elements. *Leather*: durable, adequate, and capable of protecting.

God provided a covering for Adam and Eve, and he predicted the coming of the ultimate covering:

So the Lord God said to the serpent . . . “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”
(Genesis 3:14-15)

Christ would come, and he would shed his blood on the cross to become the ultimate solution for sin (Hebrews 10:10, 14)! ‘Normal’ would once again be made available, restoring the spiritual connection to a previously broken, abnormal humanity, whose spirits lacked his Life.



Process

In what area(s) of your life are you living independently from God?

How difficult is it for you to acknowledge wrongdoing? What defense mechanism(s) do you employ to keep from coming clean? Blame? Deflection? Victimization? Isolation?

In what areas of your life do you still struggle with the temptation to hide?



Reflect

How does the Bible's description of 'normal' compare to the current cultural definition of normal? How does this challenge your ideas of what you're seeking in life?

How would your life look different if you aligned your thoughts of 'normal' with God's description of 'normal'?

Memorize

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds of the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Prayer

Father, thank you for desiring a relationship with me. I realize that I can't live the way you made me to live apart from you. You are my source; show me how to live from you today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bottom Line

God's design for normal humanity is that we find our source of Life in him.

2: SPIRIT

Being sick is never fun. But being sick and not knowing why can be deeply disturbing — when every doctor you talk to is confused about the list of symptoms you display. No root illness can be discovered, so no clear treatment can be offered. Therefore, all you're left to do is take a smattering of medications, hoping to alleviate some of the presenting symptoms. But you know the real illness still lies unaddressed.

Have you ever felt like that with a personal issue? We feel sad or confused or angry or worried. We feel unworthy or unloved. We cope with things that mask the symptoms — pride to cover a sense of being unloved, substance abuse to numb a sense of shame, or a false self-image to mask fear — but never really hit the heart of the problem.

There is something deeper about who we are, and with a better diagnosis, we can begin to apply the healing salve of God's truth to the proper place.

LOOKING INWARD

Let's return again to the Garden of Eden:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds of the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

We know God made us, but let's take a look at what it means to be made in his image, in his likeness.

One of the foundational, core beliefs in Christian theology is the Trinity: God is three-in-one — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. One aspect of what it means to be made in his image is to be made three-in-one.

Read the following verses and see what you observe about the make-up of humans:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole **spirit**, **soul**, and **body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

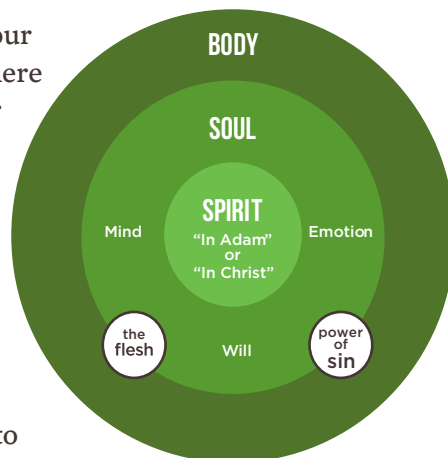
For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing **soul** and **spirit**, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

God made us body, soul, and spirit, and each part has a specific role and purpose in our daily life. While the world starts from the outside in, God made us to begin from the inside out.

Our spirit is where we *receive* God’s Life, our soul is where we *experience* God’s Life, and our body is where we *express* that Life.¹

Spirit: Though unseen, it is the innermost part of our humanity and where we *receive* God’s Life, and where our identity is determined.² Biblically speaking, our spiritual status is either “in Adam” (independent from God) or “in Christ” (brought into union with God). In the New Testament, the Greek word for ‘spirit’ is *pneuma* (‘noo-ma’). (See John 3:5-8, 1 Cor. 2:10-12)

Soul: The mind, will, and emotions make up the soul. This is a part of the inner human made to *experience* God’s Life. Though we may be tempted to



¹ For more on the distinction between soul and spirit, read “Start Here” at benttree.org/editorial-soul-and-spirit

² The term ‘heart’ is used in the Bible sometimes to refer to our spirit, sometimes to our soul, and sometimes to both the spirit and soul. ‘Nature’ refers to the basic attributes or essential makeup of a person, their identity. When applied to a person, ‘nature’ refers to the spirit, which determines a person’s true identity: “in Christ” (saved) or “in Adam” (unsaved).

live from our soul — based on our perceptions or emotions — it is not where our primary and ultimate identity is determined. In the New Testament, the Greek word for ‘soul’ is *psyche* (‘soo-kay’). (See Romans 12:2, 1 John 3:19-20, Hebrews 12:9)

Body: Expresses our soul and spirit, functioning in the physical realm through sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smell. In our world, this is the most known part of us and is most often where we are tempted to find our identity. It’s the role of the body to *express God’s Life*. In the New Testament, the Greek word for ‘body’ is *soma* (‘so-mah’).³ (See Romans 6:12-14, Romans 12:1, 1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Humans are three-in-one. Humanity’s original design was to live in spiritual union with God, the source of Life, to experience that Life in our souls, and express that Life through our physical bodies to the world around us.

But there’s a problem, isn’t there? The fall of Adam and Eve has affected each one of us. Remember their response to God after they ate the fruit? It clearly showed that they had severed that union. That day they died spiritually as they turned their backs on God, the author and source of Life.


But in Christ, God has done something astounding to fix the problem. In John 3:5-7, Jesus spoke of the spiritual reality that must take place for people to be made new in him.

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and of Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’”

Spiritual resurrection was necessary before humans could be restored to ‘normal’ human design. This is what Jesus accomplished!

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And **God raised us up** with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6, emphasis added)

³ This is different than what is called “the flesh,” the mindset that is described later in this lesson.



Anyone who has received Jesus' salvation has been born again of the Spirit, raised back to spiritual life through our spiritual union with God (Romans 6:1-7). It's a done deal for all believers — an action completed in the past with ramifications for the present, carrying on into eternity. (We'll look more into that in the next chapter.)

PROPER DIAGNOSIS

Though we are restored to Life in our spirits, we still struggle with sin, don't we?

While it is true that we have been made new in the core of our being and our new nature is not sinful, we do have the flesh at work within us, as well as the power of sin. **The flesh is a pattern of thinking or a soul strategy of living that leads us to think, feel, and choose as if we are independent of God** (Romans 8:5-8).⁴ It is an attitude continually reinforced by the world, Satan, and the power of sin. It prompts us to live out of our own resources (such as personality, education, looks, talent, power, self-discipline, I.Q., and self-strength) in order to cope with life, solve problems, meet needs, and try to become a success. In other words, the flesh is attempting to live life ignoring or even denying Christ's Life within us.

While the flesh is basically choosing to live independent of God, the **power of sin presents sin as good and entices the flesh to flare up**, often making us feel “overwhelmed” with desire to act in a way contrary to God's design for us. Satan lies to us in our thoughts, encouraging us to live according to the flesh, and the predominate messages in our world often tell us to try to cope or succeed in our own strength.

Sound familiar?

The life that leads to frustration is one in which a Christian is not living from his or her true identity in Christ (refer to the idea of ‘normal’ in chapter 1).

It is critical that we make a distinction between our thoughts and behaviors that come from the flesh and those that come from our *true identity in Christ*. Our fleshly responses do not define who we are!

⁴ Note: This manifestation of ‘the flesh’ as a mindset is distinct from anything regarding our physical “skin-and-bones” body.

Circle the “flesh patterns” you resonate with most (for a more extensive list, turn to Appendix 2, on page 65):

- Perfectionist
- Controlling
- Self-righteous
- People-pleasing
- Sarcastic
- Manipulative
- Passive
- Self-Condemning
- Obsessed with accomplishments
- Critical
- Withdrawal / escape
- Fearful / anxious
- Insecure
- Directed by feelings
- Pride
- Avoidance
- Emotional co-dependence
- Defensiveness
- Assuming the worst
- Holding a grudge
- Refusing to relax, rest
- Self-absorbed
- Intimidating others
- Irritable and impatient
- Rage
- Substance abuse
- Medicating with media
- Obsessed with staying busy

This is not an exhaustive list of ways we may try to live in our own strength, but it is helpful to begin to recognize ways you are tempted to live contrary to who you are now in Christ.

Be encouraged, though — you are free from the flesh and from the power of sin because of Christ!

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation — but it is **not to the flesh**, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:12-13, emphasis added)



Those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24, emphasis added)

In the same way, count yourselves **dead to sin** but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:11, emphasis added)

Because of your spiritual union with the Life of Christ, you are free to live in faith-filled dependence on God!

When we do chose to operate in the flesh, and we sin, we have this wonderful truth to which we can come back:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

As Christians, there is an ongoing decision that we must face: Are we going to live out of our own strength and resources or will we allow Christ to express himself through us? Think back to the two options represented in the two trees from Chapter 1.

From what source are you trying to draw life — God or something (someone) else?

When we are tempted to sin, it is an act of faith to turn from our imitation sources of life, to *remember* who we are in Christ, and to *step forth* in obedient faith. Christ’s enabling is the power behind our obedience, but we must choose with our will to walk in accordance with who we really are. The “walk” of the believer is an experience in our souls of our spiritual union with Jesus.

Rather than trying to “be a better Christian” by striving to manage our behavior, we are called to rest in Jesus’ work, respond to his leading, and offer ourselves to express his Life.



Process

What are some ways you struggle to find your source in the Life of Christ?

How will knowing these truths about your spirit and the flesh affect your struggles with sin?

How do these truths influence you to think differently than you did before about God? About yourself? About others?

Reflect

How does properly diagnosing the source of your struggle help you find healing?

What are some “flesh patterns” you see in your life? How are you trying to find your source of Life apart from Christ’s provision for you?

Describe examples of how your life looks when you are living with Jesus as your source of Life.



Memorize

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

Prayer

Father, thank you for bringing me out of death and into life in the core of my being! As I go through today, please reveal to me, by your Spirit, areas where I've been blind and have chosen to live independent of you — my “flesh patterns.” I don't want to settle for living that way. I want to experience you in every area of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bottom Line

Because of your spiritual union with the Life of Christ, you are free from the flesh and the power of sin!

3: UNITED

Heaven sounds amazing. Streets of gold and rooms prepared for us in the Father’s house by Jesus himself (John 14:2). Perfection. Peace. No more suffering and no more pain. Living in the visible presence of our Creator. Indeed, a glorious future awaits every believer in Christ!

But so many Christians look expectantly to the day when they are in heaven and live defeated today. Was salvation only about getting us to heaven *someday*? Could there be more?

At salvation, you are forgiven. Christ died for you (Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24) and you have come to believe it and accept that truth in your life. You have accepted the free gift of his grace (Romans 6:23, Colossians 1:13-14) and in faith can thank him for paying for your sins. You have eternal life, having been delivered from eternal death (John 5:24) and spiritually united with him (Romans 6:4-8).

But Jesus didn’t just die so you could have your sins forgiven. That was incredibly important; but there’s more to the story. His death was a prerequisite for God’s grand purpose in salvation — to bring us into an intimate relationship with him, to bring us from death (spiritual separation from him) to Life (spiritual union with him) — all of which brings praise and honor to God!⁵ This is the Life that Jesus gives in abundance (John 10:10)! Remember, he made us in three parts and was intentional in how he made each aspect of us: a spirit to *receive* his Life, a soul to *experience* his Life, and a body to *express* his Life.

⁵ God’s grand purpose in saving us is done “to the praise of his glorious grace.” Paul expands this idea in Ephesians 1:3-14.



RAISED TO NEW LIFE

Romans 6:4-8 tells us about the important change that occurred when we came to Christ:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

When you placed your faith in Christ for salvation, God placed you with Christ, in his death, burial, and resurrection. It is a great mystery, to be sure! But Paul wrote of it often:

- “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).
- “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).
- “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).
- “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7).

Since you were crucified with Christ, buried with him, and raised up with him, you are now indwelt by him through his Spirit in your human spirit. This is your new identity: “*Christ in you*” and “*you in Christ.*”

Because of your spiritual union with Christ, you have been made new!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

If you go a little further down in 2 Corinthians 5, you’ll see this conclusion to the chapter: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the

righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Your identity has changed! In your spirit, you are one with Christ. It’s beautifully freeing, deeply intimate, and incredibly empowering.

You are now in a holy union with Jesus! By his Holy Spirit he lives in your human spirit in a deeply intimate relationship. You are now “in Christ,” no longer “in Adam,” and that means in your spirit you are now like Jesus — holy, righteous, blameless, perfect, and complete! This is based on the sole fact that his Life has transformed and indwelt you.

You may be thinking, “If you only knew what I’ve done” or “If you could hear what I think about” or “If you saw the things I look at, then you would know I’m not holy, righteous, blameless, perfect, and complete. I may be forgiven, but I’m definitely not holy.”

The truth is that though we are united to the Life of Christ in our spirits, our souls are still very much in process. Our souls are presently undergoing renewal, as we experience the transforming power of his Life affecting our mind, will, and emotions. It is for this reason that Paul challenges believers in Galatians 5 to choose to walk in accordance with the Spirit (who is in union with your human spirit) and not according to the flesh.

However, because Christ is in you, you are no longer a slave to sin, fear, or death (Romans 6:5-7). You are free! You are new in Christ!


LIVING IN THE NEW

Read how Peter describes believers in 2 Peter 1:3-4:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may **participate in the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption of the world caused by evil desires. (emphasis added)

Because you are a new creation, you are *completely compatible* with God. You can’t be a participant of the divine nature and still be sinful by nature as well. That would be a house divided against itself. You see, not only were your sins forgiven at salvation, but your identity was also *forever changed*.

So if all this is true, why is sin such a daily struggle?



The battle isn't taking place for your spirit — you are sealed and nothing can ever change that (Ephesians 4:30, John 10:28-29)! The battleground of the mind is where we find ourselves each day, and we are influenced in our thoughts, emotions, and actions either by the Spirit, the flesh, or the power of sin.

Satan, the flesh, and the power of sin still war against us, in an attempt to keep us from living in the truth of our identity in Christ. Lies flood our patterns of thinking daily, often in the form of accusations, and we then believe the lies because we are familiar with them. Some have been running through our minds for as long as we can remember — lies spoken to us by our peers, our friends, our enemies, our parents, our teachers, and our culture.

Maybe you recognize a few of them:

- *You are what you do.*
- *You're only as good as the last thing you did.*
- *You're a failure.*
- *You're a loser.*
- *You're too smart.*
- *You're too stupid.*
- *You're too sensitive.*
- *You'll never amount to anything.*
- *You're worthless.*
- *There's no way anyone could ever love you.*
- *You have to keep it all together.*
- *I love you, if . . .*

For more identity in Christ statements, turn to Appendix 1 on page 63.

The most poisonous lies we believe are often in first person — *I'm unlovable because I am _____*. But those lies come from Satan, and influence us through the power of sin.

In light of the lies we sometimes believe, Paul tells us to take our thoughts to Christ:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Paul even went so far as to describe an important aspect of his ministry as setting thoughts straight under the truth of Christ:

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and **we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.** (2 Corinthians 10:5, emphasis added)

Will we believe what God says about us or what the accuser says about us?

Will we set our minds on Christ or on worldly things?

Will we look to define ourselves based on our thoughts, feelings, and choices, or based on our relationship with Christ?

These critical questions may be much easier to read and answer than they are to actually live out, but it doesn't change the fact that you have been restored to new Life! God isn't looking at you through some kind of imaginary "Jesus filter," only saying you're ok because your sins are covered from his sight. He sees you for who *you* really are — a new creation, united with Christ and therefore holy, righteous, perfect, blameless, and complete — because that's what is true about you.



Let's look at some things that are true of you in Christ:

I am unconditionally loved (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

- I am worthy of God's love (Colossians 3:12).
- I am accepted and acceptable (Romans 15:7).
- I am free (Galatians 5:1).
- I am secure (Romans 8:32).
- I am victorious (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- I am a saint (Ephesians 1:1).
- I am Christ's friend (John 15:15).
- I am God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10).

Heaven will be glorious *one day!* But what about today? What does it mean to you that Jesus is your Life (Colossians 3:3)? Do you believe you are holy, righteous, perfect, and complete *today* because of your spiritual union with Jesus?

Christ in you . . . you in Christ. You are no longer a sinner. Instead, you have become a saint who sometimes sins. That's a big difference!



Process

Where is it most difficult for you to live out of your new, true identity of “*Christ in you . . . you in Christ*”? How do those thoughts and feelings line up with the Scriptures you read in this chapter?

What lies have you come to believe about who you are? What lies have you internalized?

Read about your new identity in Appendix 1: Identity in Christ (page 63). Write down which truths combat the lies you’ve believed about yourself.

Reflect

What is one significant life experience (good or bad) that shaped what you believe about yourself?

What is one of the biggest hindrances keeping you from embracing your identity in Christ?

In what ways has this chapter challenged your understanding of what took place at salvation?



Memorize

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

Prayer

Father, thank you for making me new! Continue to teach me who I am in you and who you are in me. Please, by your Spirit, reveal the truth of my identity in you, renewing my mind that I may live accordingly. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bottom Line

You have been made new — Christ in you . . . you in Christ!

*Tragically, Christians still attempt to copy the Christ of history **in their own strength**. The fact is, only one person ever lived the Christian life — it was Jesus . . . So the Christian life is nothing less than “the out-living of the indwelling Christ” on the principle of dependent faith.*

Stephen F. Olford, “Not I but Christ”

*Christ gave his life **for** you so he could give his life **to** you so he could live his life **through** you.*

Major W. Ian Thomas



4: ABIDE

Expert dog trainers report that “stay” is the hardest command for a dog to learn. Most pups have trouble remaining in place and being still because they are so easily distracted. A dog’s meager powers of concentration are no match for loud sounds, sudden movements, or even a shift in the wind. Keeping eye contact with its master is the only foolproof way for a dog to learn to stay put when commanded. Though the pup has a home with his master, he must be trained to keep his attention on the master’s voice.

Jesus voiced the biblical equivalent to the “stay” command in John 15:4. He told his disciples:

“Abide (‘stay,’ ‘remain’) in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.” (NASB)


Jesus spoke these words for us, too. Despite the distractions of living in this world, abiding (*staying or remaining*) in Jesus is how we were made to live.

This is where Jesus began his discussion on abiding: Jesus, the vine, is the one true source of spiritual Life. The Father, as the vinedresser or gardener, sent Jesus to be the savior of the world, so that we can have Life in and through the Son.

As the true vine, Jesus is the source of Life and strength. There is a relationship of complete dependence between the branch and the vine, the believer and Jesus.

[Jesus said] “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5, NASB)

The vine lives independently of the branches, but the branches can live only if they are in



the vine and the life of the vine is in them. The vine supplies life-giving nourishment to the branches. Drawing Life from Jesus as our source, we bear “fruit” (an outward evidence of inward Life). Apart from the vine, the branches have neither Life nor fruit.

A SPIRITUAL REALITY

In this passage, Jesus reveals a deeper truth — that we *do abide*, and we *are called* to abide. We abide in him and he abides in us in the core of our being. That is a constant, stable, unwavering truth. When we are united with him in our spirit, we are never *not* united. Because of this union, we are always with him, abiding.

To abide simply means that Christ is our permanent spiritual home. Where do we *live*? We *live* in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit alive in us, this promise is not only for today but also for our future eternity when we are physically raised with Christ in eternity.

And you also were included *in Christ* when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14, emphasis added)

Anyone who is in Christ *abides* in Christ. “In Christ” is our full-time spiritual address, and he is our constant source of Life. “Abiding in Christ” is who we are and how we were made to live. This is Christ’s promise of continual, permanent abiding. That will never change, for it is dependent upon him and his character. He has brought you into new life that you would walk in it (Romans 6:3-5), instead of turning back to the old way (Galatians 5:1).

AN INVITATION FOR THE SOUL

So why don’t we always *experience* that reality? In our souls there is still a choice for us to make — to live from the true source, Jesus Christ, or to try to live from a substitute. This directly impacts the daily experience of our lives, regardless of our circumstances.

As a believer, you are *invited to live from him as your source* — to abide (remain, stay) in your soul where you abide (reside, live) in your spirit, so that you *experience* the Life that is in you, the life you were made to live.

You will choose to abide (remain, stay) where you believe you belong. Remember, you belong to him because of his finished work on the cross, and you have been brought into union with him in your spirit when you put your faith in him by grace. You were made to belong in a deeply intimate relationship with Jesus. You are deeply loved by him.

When you know where you belong, then you know when you're home. If you don't know where you belong, you'll keep searching and will filter your life through the longing to find exactly where you fit.

Throughout human history, people have sought to find belonging in this world. We've believed that we'll finally *fit* when we have enough success, power, recognition, love, physical pleasure, money, respect, or the accumulation of material possessions.

No matter how much we're able to accomplish any of the items from that list, there will be a lack of fulfillment – a longing for more. These are all substitutes. None of those things can ever truly satisfy the longing of our souls.


So where do you believe you belong? Where do you fit? Knowing where you belong is directly related to knowing who you are. And our souls will only find rest when we live from where we truly belong.

LEARNING TO REST

Trying to find life from substitute sources, striving to find fulfillment in them, can be exhausting. Even religious effort can become a false source that distracts us from a soul-rest in Christ's work for us. Jesus brings this truth to our attention in the Matthew's Gospel:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)

Because Christ abides (remains, stays) in us, we can experience rest for our souls by



beginning *from him*, instead of trying to strive *for him*! And this rest can be a way of life that we learn from him, the “unforced rhythms of grace.”

Upon what basis can we rest? If we are “burned out on religion,” is resting just giving up? Read what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says about spiritual rest:

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Just as we “rested from our work” when we first came to faith in Jesus, receiving his salvation on the terms of his work not ours, so in our everyday life with him we have entered that “Sabbath-rest.” The work of Christ is constantly our sufficiency. It is always enough for us to be accepted and acceptable before God. Because of Christ’s work on the cross, we are cleansed forever. By his Spirit alive in us, he has irrevocably drawn near to us — every moment of every day.

Christ is enough. When we trust in this reality — letting it center our thoughts, guide our emotions, and direct our wills — we find rest for our souls.

This is where you belong. You’ve been born again (John 3), made a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and have been raised with him (Romans 6:4) — you belong in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3), at God’s throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). Because of the finished work of Christ, you now abide in your spirit where you were always intended to belong *with him*. This is great news!

Christ abides with us in our spirits, where we are in union with him, and he invites us to live from that place of rest.⁶

When we do, not only do we experience his rest promised in Matthew 11, but we enjoy the abundant Life of Christ (John 10:10) that floods our souls like rivers of living water (John 7:38), satisfying the deepest longings that we have, because the longings are only quenched by the Source (John 4:14).

⁶ Read more in Andrew Murray’s “Abide in Christ.”

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

In his soul, J. Hudson Taylor was experiencing a life of anxiety, stress, exhaustion, frustration, disappointment, and failure. He was a lifelong missionary in the 1800's and founder of China Inland Mission. He had an unmistakable call to be a missionary in China. However, after beginning the work in China, through many trials, illnesses, loss of loved ones, and massive obstacles, he found himself at the place of giving up.

During that season of life, he was reading John 15, reflecting on Jesus' invitation to abide. The Holy Spirit revealed a deeply profound and life-altering truth to him: God is faithful, he faithfully abides in us, and he will never leave us! Here's how Hudson Taylor describes that moment:

As I read, I saw it all! "If we believe not, he abideth faithful." I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh, how joy flowed!) — that He had said, "I will never leave thee."

"Ah, there is rest!" I thought. "I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more. For has not He promised to abide with me never to leave me, never to fail me?"⁷

Hudson Taylor, though circumstances were rarely favorable from a worldly perspective, described how he was experiencing the Life of Christ in his soul:

If you are ever-drinking at the Fountain, with what will your life be running over? – Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!⁸

He had begun living from the reality that Jesus was always with him, never leaving nor forsaking him. He had begun living from the true source. He was living out the truth that he abided and was called to abide.



⁷ "Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret." London: China Inland Mission, 1935. p. 114-116.

⁸ *Ibid.*



Process

What distractions in your life keep you from focusing on the reality that Christ is your permanent spiritual home?

How does the idea that you are always at home with Christ affect you?

What does it look like for you, right now, to rest in Christ?

Reflect

What distractions keep you from focusing on his love?

What other sources do you turn to in an attempt to cope with the difficulties of life?

In what areas of your life do you avoid resting in the truth that Christ is enough?

Memorize

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Prayer

“Jesus I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart. Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, and Thy beauty fills my soul, for by Thy transforming power, Thou hast made me whole. Oh how great Thy lovingkindness, vaster, broader than the sea: Oh how marvelous Thy goodness, lavished all on me! Yes, I rest in Thee, Beloved, know what wealth of grace is Thine, know Thy certainty of promise, and have made it mine.”⁹

Father, thank you that I have a permanent spiritual residence with you in Christ. Enable me to rest in your loving presence with me today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Bottom Line

We do abide (spiritually) with Christ and are called to abide (in our souls) with Christ.

⁹ From “Jesus, I am Resting, Resting,” a favorite hymn of Hudson Taylor.



5: DANCE


Have you ever prayed a prayer like this: “Lord, I just long for more of you and less of me! In fact, I want *all* of you and *none* of me. Please move me out of the way so you can have your way in me.”

Maybe in that prayer your desire was for God to use you and be glorified in you. Sounds good, right? But if you think more about that prayer, you may see that it conveys the idea that you as a person — with your talents, history, strengths, and weaknesses — isn’t very valuable, and that the Christian life is just *Jesus* and not *you*. Is that even possible? If that’s the case, it’s not much of a relationship!¹⁰

No, God saved you in order to express himself through you uniquely! And he does that with each one of us. *Christ in you* and *you in Christ*. You are completely compatible with him! Each person’s unique life experiences and personality traits are valuable tools in the hands of the Redeemer. He doesn’t want to negate you; he wants to convey worth to you through his love for you. And in that love, he invites each one of us into a close relationship where we learn to experience him and to respond to his leading.

Think of it like this: A guy and girl decide to go out dancing. They finally find the place where they think they would enjoy getting on the dance floor, so they go in. Now, the girl is a great dancer. The guy is not — he’s not nearly flexible enough! As they get on the dance

¹⁰ Perhaps John the Baptist’s comment comes to mind here: “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). Remember, that wasn’t a statement of John’s *personality* but a statement regarding the status of John’s *ministry* — at one time he drew a huge crowd but later it was Jesus who drew the crowds. John welcomed the diminishing of his ministry so that Jesus’ ministry would be greater.



floor, he stumbles around and has trouble getting the steps right. Finally, in desperation, he says to her, “This dance would be so much better if I just got out of your way and let you do it without me!”

That wouldn’t make much sense! For one, *they* wouldn’t be dancing, would they? They would not experience the closeness, enjoyment, and beauty that comes with the dance. In fact, the failed experience would likely lead to isolation, shame, and a sense of failure in the relationship.

God isn’t looking for you to “get out of the way.” He’s inviting you to dance. A dance where he — the Creator of the movements — leads the way, and you — the partner leaning in, close to his chest and held within his arms — follows wherever he takes you. This takes trust, and following becomes easier when the leader knows what he is doing. In every step, you are invited to trust him.

LEARNING THE STEPS

It’s a dance of grace. In the same way we came to him through his grace, so we live day by day in that grace. Consider this verse:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

How did you receive Christ Jesus as Lord? By grace through faith — an act of total dependence, acknowledging that without him you can’t live the life you were created to live. How are you to live now that you have received him? By grace through faith — in total dependence, acknowledging that without him you can’t live the Christian life.

He knows what he’s doing, and he’s invited us to trust him, depend on him, enjoy him, and experience him in each moment of this life.

Instead of trying to live the Christian life on our own, or even simply “with his help,” we were made to live responding to his leading in total dependence on him. Remember what Jesus said about resting in him?

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)

Total dependence on Jesus — he leads, we follow. He moves, we respond. He holds us, we lean on him. **He lives in us, we live in him. In the core of our being, we’ve been made new, and we now look to him, trusting him to renew our minds with truth, heal our emotions, align our will with his, and live through us.** This is the dance.

As Christ leads us in the dance, we need the ability to hear his cues. We’ve got to hear his voice. Jesus was, in fact, confident that we would. He said it like this:

“[The shepherd] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because **they know his voice**. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice . . . I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and **my sheep know me**” (John 10: 3b-5, 14, emphasis added)

As we spend time with Jesus, we tune our ears to his voice. We learn about who he is. Through knowing the Bible, reflecting on his truth in prayer, and living in authentic community with other believers, we let him speak truth to dispel the lies we’ve believed. We let him confront us in our sin. We let him challenge us to move boldly where he’s calling us. As this happens, we learn the steps of the dance, and we find ourselves walking in his ways!

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. (1 John 5:3-4a)

MARCH NO MORE

But we don’t do these things in order to check off a list or to make God like us more because of our performance, as tempting as that might be. That would be less like *dancing* and more like *marching*. Soldiers march. Their cadence is uniform. They are given orders by a commanding officer. The march is a display of military might. This is not intimacy; it is



following orders.

Does your life with Christ feel like a march sometimes? Do you get caught up in lists of rules, believing that if you complete the list, you'll be ok?

This, friend, is a lie. It is based on the law. It is performance-based acceptance, and from this we have been freed.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Lists can seem comfortable; rules can feel deceptively “doable.” The gospel is not about making rules — even the Ten Commandments — “doable”! If we’re using our accomplishments to make us feel like we are acceptable (whether before God or just to ourselves), we have turned our attention away from the grace that Christ offers. But we don’t have to settle for self-effort. We can enjoy freedom found in his grace! Just like the guy in the opening story who lacked the flexibility to move with the music, freedom of movement is needed to enjoy the dance!

Because we are free, we can learn to respond to his leading, as we delight and trust in his care for us. This moves us so far beyond “dutiful Christianity” where we check off our moral to-do’s. This draws us into intimate relating with and relying on Jesus. For some of us, this changes how we see the Bible — moving it from a book of rules to a love letter from the God who wants us to know his voice.

The dance comes from our freedom in his grace, which stems from the life of faith. Our faith isn’t in “*our* faith,” but in the *Son of God*. That’s an important distinction, which determines the true object of our trust — whether it’s our religious efforts or his Life at work in us.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. **The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God,** who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20, emphasis added)

As we dance with him, we learn that in his perfect grace he is enough for us.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

At this place of dependence, we see that he redeems everything. At this place of dependence, we begin to see that in him "what is impossible with man is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

It's at this place that we best experience his Life that is already in us. This is what he wants to do in us and what he longs for us to experience in this life. This divine dance is what our souls were made for!

In a well-known verse, Jesus said:

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

Another way of translating that phrase 'to the full' in the original Greek is 'expansive.' Imagine a parachute opening up. As the Good Shepherd leads us, his freedom opens up our horizons.

He's brought you to fullness in him (Colossians 2:9-10). He has not held himself back from you. And because of your spiritual union with Jesus, he is wholly and forever near. Instead of praying, "More of you and less of me," or "All of you and none of me," we are invited to rejoice in the prayer, "All of you in all of me!" You can trust him, even when it appears to be impossible. This dance with Jesus is an incredible adventure, and it's so worth it!

God invites us into an ever-deepening experience with him — which is a journey we will never complete. Charles Spurgeon, a preacher and thinker of the early twentieth century, said this of the adventure of knowing God:

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drown in its infinity . . . But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it . . . Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of a man, as a devout, earnest, continuing investigation of the great subject of the Deity.¹¹

¹¹ Charles Haden Spurgeon, "The New Park Street Pulpit," vol 1, 1855 (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), p. 1.

Or, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote:

In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

You will roll them up like a robe;
like a garment they will be changed.

**But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.**

(Hebrews 1:10-12, emphasis added)

This moment, the adventure awaits you — knowing the sovereign, eternal God through every moment. The Life of Christ is within you. You are new. You are secure in him. You are free from law, sin, and shame. Dance! Learn the steps, then take a risk and follow his lead. It will feel clumsy at first (or maybe every time), but respond to him. This is a life of dependence in faith. It's a life of trust.



Process

How have you tried to lead in your life, instead of following Jesus' leading?

What parameters have you set up that you want God to stay within? When you think of total dependence on Jesus and nothing else, what concerns come to mind?

Where have you willingly joined the dance and followed his lead?

Reflect

What area(s) of your life would look different if your mindset was “Jesus, all of you in all of me” instead of “more of you and less of me”?

How would your relationships with others be different if you realized his grace is sufficient for you in every moment (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

Why is “marching” often easier than “dancing”? What do we miss out on when we simply “march”?

Memorize

[Jesus said] “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

(Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)



Prayer

Father, I believe that you've invited me into a personal, intimate relationship with you — a dance, not a march. Show me the ways that I'm marching instead of dancing, and teach me the “unforced movements of grace.” I trust you now to be enough for me. I love you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bottom Line

We are free to respond to his leading as we delight and trust in his care for us.

6: OFFER

You may have heard of Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman who was imprisoned in German concentration camps during World War II for hiding Jews in her home. After she was released and the war was over, she began a ministry of telling people about God's love and forgiveness. After one meeting, a man approached her. She recognized him as one of the German guards at the concentration camp where she had been held.

Though she had just spoken on the power of forgiveness, she felt a rush of emotion as the man approached. The man introduced himself and told her he had since become a Christian. He knew he was forgiven by God of his past, but he was desperate to hear words of forgiveness from her.

Corrie froze in fear. The last thing she felt like doing was clasping his outstretched hand and speaking the words he had requested.

How could Jesus live through her in this moment? Though she didn't feel like it, she chose to agree with God that she didn't have to live according to her emotions, but could live by faith — trusting Jesus to be enough for her.

She reached out her hand and took his, and only then the feelings rushed in. Weeping, she wholeheartedly responded with the words he had asked to hear — that she indeed forgave him as well. As she offered herself to God's work in and through her, the Holy Spirit gave her the ability to forgive and offer forgiveness.

When you've taken time to apply Christ's truth to your soul so that you *experience* the Life of Jesus, and a situation arises where you are called upon to *express* that Life to the world around us, how do you bridge the gap between what you know in the soul and how you live in the body?



LIFE EXPRESSED

Romans 6:11-14 tells us the answer:

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather **offer yourselves to God** as those who have been brought from death to life; and **offer every part of yourself to him** as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (emphasis added)

Notice the progression of thought: You are alive in Christ Jesus. In your physical body, you can either express sin or express his righteousness. His grace has made it possible for us to express Christ's righteousness, but there is one thing we must do . . .

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1, emphasis added)

Offer ourselves to God. This is how we make ourselves available to him.

How do our feet follow the steps of the dance? We offer them to the leading of another! They're still our feet, but they move in the steps of the dance as we yield to the one who leads.

Have you ever noticed that the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) describes who Jesus is? Jesus *is* loving and peaceful. He *is* joyful. He *is* patient. He *is* kind, good, faithful, gentle, and never out of control.

The incredible reality for all believers is that Jesus lives *in* us and will live *through* us, inviting us to cooperate with him in every moment.

Jesus is love. Since you are united with him, he has made you loving. Jesus is peace and has made you peaceful and a peace-maker. Jesus is forgiving, therefore forgiving others is more natural for you than holding a grudge. Jesus is joyful and is our joy. You are free to let him express who he is through you to those around you, even when you don't feel like it.

Of course, it isn't easy, but it's crucial. God has a greater plan for all of us as we step into this opportunity.

ORIGINS RESTORED

God's gracious plan for redeemed humanity is to restore us to his original design — to spread his reign on the earth as we operate in dependence on him (Genesis 1:26, 28). As we offer ourselves to him, especially in our physical bodies, the Life of the King is made manifest on the earth!

Read this excerpt from “The Saving Life of Christ” by Major W. Ian Thomas:

“Faithful is he that calls you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

The one who calls you to a life of righteousness is the one who by our consent lives that life of righteousness *through* you! The one who calls you to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, is the one who by your consent, goes into all the world and preaches the gospel to every creature *through* you!

This is the divine genius that saves a man from the futility of self-effort. It relieves the Christian of the burden of trying to pull himself up by his own bootstraps! If it were not for this divine provision, the call to Christ would be a source of utter frustration, presenting the sorry spectacle of a sincere idealist, constantly thwarted by his own inadequacy.

If you will but trust Christ, not only for the death he died in order to redeem you, but also for the life that he lives and waits to live through you, the very next step you take will be a step taken in the very energy and power of God himself. You will have begun to live a life which is essentially supernatural, yet still clothed with the common humanity of your physical body, and still worked out both in the big and the little things that inevitably make up the lot of a man who, though his heart may be with Christ in heaven, still has his two feet firmly planted on the earth . . .

You will be restored to your true humanity to be the human vehicle of the divine life.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a physical carrier of the divine Life of Christ?
How does that recalibrate your sense of purpose?



DIVINELY ENERGIZED

The Apostle Peter challenged the church to this end:

If anyone **speaks**, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone **serves**, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in **all things** God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11, emphasis added)

In each physical expression, God can receive praise through your actions. As we have discussed in previous lessons, the *source* is the key — thoughts and actions sourced in self leads to isolation, shame, exhaustion; thoughts and actions sourced in Christ's Life within you leads to his praise.

Allowing Jesus to express himself through you is a byproduct of intimacy with him — knowing him deeply and realizing how much he knows you, loves you, and enjoys you. It doesn't have to be forced or a performance but rather an overflow of the Life that is within you, like a river of living water (John 7:38).

As you have experienced intimacy with him in your soul, **now offer your body to be used by him to express his character to the world in which you live.**

In the Christian life, it is easy for us to begin to believe we are supposed to live *for* God. But it's so much more than that! God has made us new so that we can live *through* God and God can live *through* us!

As we've discussed throughout this study, the Christian life isn't one of obligation but one of intimacy, union, peace, new identity, victory, freedom, joy, assurance, and trust. We haven't just been saved for some day in the future; we've been rescued from the present evil age (Galatians 1:4). Experiencing and expressing the Life of Christ is God's plan for *you this very day!* This is the 'abundant' Life Jesus has called us to (John 10:10).



Process

How would you describe times when you have tried to serve God in your own strength because you thought it was something you *should* do?

What does it look like for you to offer yourself to Jesus today?

Ask the Spirit to reveal to you any areas where you aren't available to him to express himself through you. Write down what he tells you.

Reflect

What difference do you think it would make in your world if you let Christ express himself through you?

In your life today, how might God want to express himself through you? Will you say yes him?





Memorize

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1)

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11, emphasis added)

Prayer

Father, my life is yours. I offer my body to you today as my spiritual act of worship. Put Christ on display through me today. By your Spirit, direct my feet where you want me to go. Serve others through my hands, use my voice to speak your words, and show your love through my countenance. I am yours and grateful that you are mine. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bottom Line

God wants to express his Life through us as we offer our bodies to be used by him.

Daily Prayer

A good prayer that summarizes what we've discussed is below. This might help you keep in mind the key concepts from this study.

Jesus, you are my Life.

Jesus, my life is yours.

Jesus, live through me today.



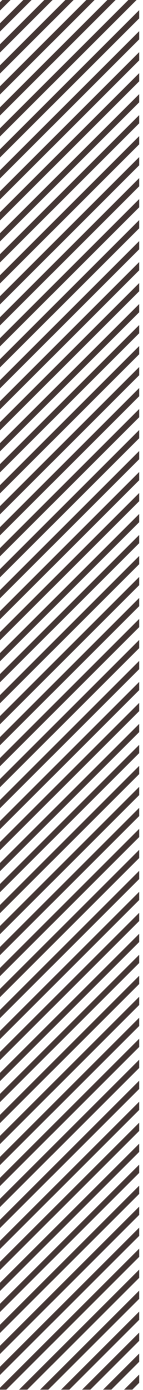
You did it! As you've been working through this devotional, our prayer is that God has revealed himself to you throughout the process. What you've studied is valuable information, but the Spirit is the one who transforms by renewing your mind with truth (Romans 12:2). And that is exactly why we were so excited to write this and for you to walk through it – so the Spirit could use this to remind you of the truth and lead you to a life of increasing dependence on him.

Hopefully, you've done this study with someone. If you didn't, we strongly encourage you to do so, because God often uses others to reveal more of himself to us, as well as to reveal lies we believe that we may be blind to ourselves.

Regardless of how you went through the study this time, take a few moments to ask God whom he would like you to invite to go through this study. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be if everyone invited a friend or loved one to do this study with them? The conversations could lead to life transformation as you both discover more about your life in Christ.

So please ask the Spirit to open your eyes to those he is prompting you to reach out to, to connect with through this study. Then, in dependence on him, invite them and see what he does!





*To find out more about Bent Tree, go to benttree.org
If you need to reach us, email info@benttree.org to start the conversation.*

SERMONS:

Dance Lessons: Sermon series on Galatians (benttree.org/dance-lessons)

I.D. – Identity Defined: Sermon series on Identity in Christ (benttree.org/id)

BOOKS:

“Relaxing with God,” by Andrew Farley

“The Indwelling Life of Christ: All of Him in All of Me,” by Major W. Ian Thomas

“Not I but Christ,” by Stephen F. Olford

“God’s Astounding Opinion of You,” by Ralph Harris

“Battleground of the Mind,” by Bill Loveless (www.christislifeministries.com)

“The Rest of the Gospel” by Dan Stone

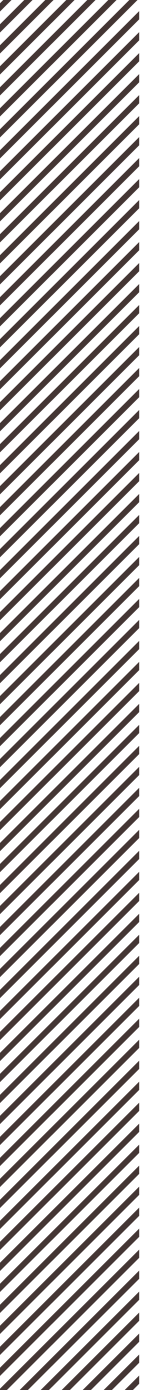
God's activity in our lives flows out of our union with him in our spirit.

We must choose to believe that God is true and that what he says about us is true!

As we've learned about who we are in Christ, let's take some time to see what the Bible says about the characteristics of our new identity in Christ. As you look over the list, **circle** the characteristics that you have the hardest time believing. Then ask God to show you his truth. Take your time.

Who you are in Christ:

- I am unconditionally loved (Romans 8:35, 38-39).
- I am worthy of God's love (Colossians 3:12).
- I am more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37).
- I am accepted and acceptable (Romans 15:7).
- I am sufficient (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- I am righteous and holy (Ephesians 4:24).
- I am a forgiving person (Colossians 3:13).
- I am complete in him (Colossians 2:10).
- I am free (Galatians 5:1).
- I am compassionate, kind, humble, and patient (Colossians 3:12).
- I am secure (Romans 8:32).
- I am victorious (1 Corinthians 15:57).
- I am sacrificially loving (John 15:13).
- I am others-focused (Philippians 2:3).
- I am joyful, faithful, gentle, peaceful, and good (Galatians 5:22, 23).
- I am a saint (Ephesians 1:1).
- I am a child of God (John 1:12).
- I am Christ's friend (John 15:15).

- 
- I am a joint heir with Christ (Romans 8:17).
 - I am in possession of the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).
 - I am a full heir of God's promises (Galatians 3:26-29).
 - I am an expression of Christ's Life (Colossians 3:4).
 - I am a partaker of Christ (Hebrews 3:14).
 - I am part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9, 10).
 - I am God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10).




The purpose of this list is to help you identify ways you live according to the flesh in your daily life. The intent is not to condemn, for “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Rather, the intent of this inventory (note: not a complete list) is to help you be aware of ways in your life you tend to operate outside of dependence on God. Once we have identified flesh patterns in our own lives, the goal is to notice more readily when we are acting in them, and pause to point our souls back to the Life of Christ and his truth.

Paul tells the Galatians that “the acts of the flesh are *obvious*” (Galatians 5:19, emphasis added) – but sometimes we need help to see our blindspots. As you do this inventory, take heart, because Paul also said, “**Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**” It doesn’t have to control you! That’s why he finished by saying this: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (See Galatians 5:19-26 for the entire reference.)

Ask the Spirit to reveal how you often attempt to cope/deal with the various situations you face in this life in ways that are independent of God’s care of you.

Finish this sentence: “*When things aren’t going the way I want them to, I respond by...*”

1. **Becoming self-absorbed** – either condemning or protecting self.
 - Self-assured: depending on myself instead of God; pride, arrogance.
 - Self-righteous: being defensive, making excuses, or blaming others.
 - Self-reliant: becoming performance-driven, legalistic, or perfectionistic.
 - Self-deprecating: taking too much responsibility; being overly apologetic; assuming you are always the problem; false humility.
 - Self-indulging: lacking of self-control; thrill-seeking; becoming compulsive; thinking more stuff will make it better.
2. **Withdrawing** – trying to isolate from others and becoming emotionally unavailable; avoiding intimacy; suppressing emotions; failing to express feelings appropriately.
3. **Attempting to dominate** – demanding, overbearing; refusing to give in; intimidating others.
4. **Escaping** – turning to substance abuse; busyness (even with good activities); partying;



pornography; overeating; over-sleeping; reading to escape; numbing with TV or movies; indulging in unhealthy relationships; work-aholism, etc.

5. **Obsessing** about what others think about you, or with how you look, with your physical health, with a cause, with material possessions, with status, with success.
6. **Assuming the worst** – anxious, fearful, paralyzed in making decisions, no peace, lack of rest, pessimistic, skeptical, lack confidence, never pleased.
7. **Trying to control** – manipulation, threats, passivity, cussing, not eating.
8. **Becoming critical** of others and/or yourself; intolerant, complaining; lacking compassion and understanding; uncaring; insensitive.
9. **Denying reality** – exaggerating; ignoring problems; lying to self and others; playing games to hide; choosing to ignore objective facts; hoping problems disappear; acting as if nothing is bad or wrong; hiding real feelings and thoughts; pretending; superficial, pretentious, fake; saying things like “it doesn’t matter” or “I don’t care anyway.”
10. **Becoming passive** – refusing to take chances; giving up; waiting for others to tell you what to think or how to feel; being indecisive, lazy, irresponsible; procrastinating.
11. **Holding a grudge** – bitter, unforgiving; hoping others fail; trying to get even; keeping a record of wrongs; being moody.
12. **Trying to please** – avoiding conflict at all costs; overly compliant and submissive; afraid of disappointing others; try to make everyone happy; difficulty saying “no”; giving in to others too easily.
13. **Being too serious** – refusing to relax; restless, impatient, easily agitated; unable to have fun and enjoy life.
14. **Living by feelings** – being too sensitive to criticism; believing truth is what you feel; interpreting rejection from others as default; controlled by fear/anger/doubts/insecurities; irritable; taking things too personally.
15. **Fighting unfair** – gossiping; being passive-aggressive; slandering; lying about others; refusing to communicate; getting snarky.