

The Purpose for Human Life: Learning to Be Like Jesus Christ

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Living and Sharing the Gospel

Contents

Chapter 1 Why Were You Born?.....	3
Chapter 2 Our Relationship With God	15
Chapter 3 Living Like Jesus in the Family of God.....	20
Chapter 4 Learning to Be Like Christ in Everyday Life	26
Chapter 5 Living the Trinitarian Life	31
Chapter 6 Looking for a Better Life	45
About the author...	58
About the publisher.....	59
You're Included...	61
Speaking of Life...	62
Grace Communion Seminary	63

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Chapter 1

Why Were You Born?

You were born for a purpose! God created each of us for a reason — and we are happiest when we are living in harmony with the purpose he has given us. You need to know what it is.

Many people have no idea what life is all about. They live, and they die, searching for some kind of meaning, wondering whether their lives have purpose — where they fit, whether they really matter in the grand scheme of things. They may have put together the finest bottle collection in Ohio, or they may have been voted “most popular” in high school, but all too soon, youthful plans and dreams evaporate into anxiety and frustration over missed opportunities, failed relationships or countless other “if-onlys” and “might-have-beens.”

Many people lead empty, unfulfilled lives, lacking in purpose and meaning beyond the short-lived gratification of money, sex, power, respect or popularity, none of which means anything, especially when the darkness of death approaches. But life could be much more than this, because God offers each of us much more. He offers us true significance and purpose — the joy of being what he created us to be.

Part 1: Made in God's image

The first chapter of the Bible tells us that God created humans “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27, NIV used throughout). Men and women are created “in the image of God” (same verse).

Obviously, we are not in God’s image in terms of height or weight or skin color. God is spirit, uncreated, and we are created of matter. Still, God has made humanity in his own image, which means that there are essential ways in which he has made us to be like him. We are self-aware, we can communicate, plan, think creatively, design and build, solve problems, and be a force for good in our world. And we can love. We can have personal relationships.

We are to be “created like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Yet, often in those very ways, people are not much like God at all. In fact, people can often be rather ungodly. In spite of our ungodliness, however, there are certain things we can be sure of. For one thing, God will always be faithful in his love toward us.

A perfect example

The New Testament helps us understand what it means to be made in the image of God. The apostle Paul tells us that God is remaking us into something that is perfect and good — the likeness of Jesus Christ. “He also predestined [us] to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). In other words, God intended from the beginning for us to be like Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh.

Paul says that Jesus himself “is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). “He is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). He is the perfect example of what we were created to be. We are God’s children, in his family, and we look to Jesus, God’s Son, to see what that means.

One of Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Show us the Father” (John

14:8). And Jesus answered, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (verse 9). In other words, Jesus says, What you really need to know about God, you can see in me. He is not talking about skin color, clothing styles, or carpentry skills — he is talking about spirit, attitude and actions. God is love, John wrote (1 John 4:8), and Jesus shows us what love is, and how we are to love as people being conformed to his image.

Since humans were made in the image of God, and Jesus is the image of God, it is no wonder that God is conforming us to the image of Jesus. He is to be “formed” in us (Galatians 4:19). Our goal is “attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). As we are changed into Jesus’ image, the image of God is restored in us, and we become what we were made to be.

Maybe you aren’t very Jesus-like right now. That’s OK. God already knows about it, and that is why he is working with you. If you let him, he will change you — transform you — to be more and more like Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). It takes patience — but the process fills life with meaning and purpose.

Why doesn’t God do it all in the blink of an eye? Because that wouldn’t take into account the real, thinking and loving person he made you to be. A change of mind and heart, the decision to turn to God and trust Christ, may take only a moment, like deciding to go down a certain road. But the actual journey down the road takes time and may be filled with obstacles and troubles. In the same way, it takes time to change habits, behaviors and ingrained attitudes.

Besides, God loves you and wants you to love him. But love is love only when it is freely given, not when it is demanded. Forced love is not love at all.

It gets better and better

God’s purpose for you is not only to be like Jesus was 2,000 years ago — but also to be like Jesus is now — resurrected, immortal, filled with glory and power! He “will transform our

lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). If we have been united with Christ in this life, “we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Romans 6:5). “We shall be like him,” John assures us (1 John 3:2).

If we are God’s children, Paul writes, then we can be sure that “we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). We will be given a glory like Jesus Christ has — bodies that are immortal, bodies that never deteriorate, bodies that are spiritual. We will be raised in glory, and raised in power (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). “Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” — we will be like Christ! (verse 49).

Would you like to have glory and immortality? God has made you for this very reason! It is a wonderful gift that he wants you to have. It is an exciting and wonderful future — and it gives life meaning and purpose.

When we see the end result, the process we are in now makes more sense. The troubles, trials and pains of life, as well as the joys, make more sense when we know what life is all about. When we know the glory that will be given to us, the sufferings of this life are easier to endure (Romans 8:18). God has given us exceedingly great and precious promises.

Is there a problem here?

But wait a minute, you might think. I’ll never be good enough for that kind of glory and power. I’m just an ordinary person. If heaven is a perfect place, then I don’t belong there. I make mistakes; my life is messed up.

God already knows that, but he isn’t going to let it stop him. He has plans for you, and he has already planned for problems like that to be overcome. That’s because everybody has blown it; everybody’s life is messed up, and nobody *deserves* to be given glory and power.

But God knows how to save people who are sinners — and no matter how many times they mess up, he knows how to rescue them. God's plan centers on Jesus Christ — who was sinless in our place, and who suffered for our sins in our place. He represents us before God and offers us the gift of eternal life, if we will accept it from him.

Part 2: The gift of God

We all fall short, Paul says, but we have been justified, or set right, through the grace of God. It's a gift! We can't earn it or deserve it — God just gives it to us out of his mercy and righteousness.

People who are doing fine on their own don't need to be saved — it is people who are in trouble who need to be saved. Lifeguards don't "save" people who are swimming on their own — they save people who are drowning. And spiritually speaking, we are all drowning. None of us measures up to the perfection of Christ, and without a rescue, we're as good as dead.

Many people seem to think that we have to be "good enough" for God. Suppose we ask them, What makes you think that you'll go to heaven, or that you'll have eternal life in the kingdom of God? Many people will respond, Because I've been good. I've done this, or I've done that.

The truth is, that no matter how much good we have done, we are never "good enough" to earn a place in a perfect world, because we are not perfect. We have fallen short, but we are set right by God's gift, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Not by good works

God has saved us, the Bible says, "not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9). "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5).

Even if our works are very good, they are not the reason God

saves us. We need to be rescued because our good works are not enough to save us. We need mercy and grace, and God gives us exactly that in Jesus Christ.

If it were possible for us to earn eternal life through good behavior, then God would have told us how. If rule-keeping could give us eternal life, Paul says, then God would have done it that way. “If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law” (Galatians 3:21). But the law cannot give us life — even if we could keep it.

“If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:21). If people could earn their way into salvation, then we wouldn’t need a Savior to rescue us. There would be no need for Jesus to come to earth, or to die and be raised again.

But Jesus came to earth for this very reason — to die for us. Jesus said that he came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). His life was like a ransom payment, given to rescue us, or redeem us. The Bible repeatedly says that “Christ died for us” and that he died “for our sins” (Romans 5:6-8; 1 Corinthians 5:14; 15:3; Galatians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:10).

“The wages of sin is death,” Paul says in Romans 6:23, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We deserve to die, but we are saved by grace through Jesus Christ. We don’t deserve to live with God, since we aren’t perfect, but God saves us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Descriptions of salvation

The Bible explains our salvation in several ways — sometimes using financial terms, sometimes sacrificial words, sometimes family or friendship words.

In financial terms, he has paid the price to free us. He took the penalty (death) that we deserved, paying the debt that we owed. He takes our sin and death, and in return, he gives us his righteousness and life.

God accepts Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf (after all, he is the one who sent Jesus to give it), and he accepts Jesus' righteousness on our behalf. Therefore, though once we were opposed to God, now we are friends (Romans 5:10).

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight" (Colossians 1:21-22).

Because of Christ's death, we are holy in God's sight. In God's book, we have gone from a huge debt to a huge positive balance — not because of what we have done, but because of what Jesus did for us. He has put the money in our account. The debts have all been paid, whether or not we believe it.

God now calls us his children — he has adopted us (Ephesians 1:5). "We are God's children" (Romans 8:16). And then Paul describes the wonderful results of our adoption: "If we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (verse 17). Salvation is described as an inheritance. "He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light" (Colossians 1:12).

Because of God's generosity, because of his grace, we will inherit a fortune — we will share the universe with Jesus Christ. Or rather, he will share it with us, not because of anything we have done, but because he loves us and wants to give it to us.

Received through faith

Jesus has qualified us; he has paid the penalty not only for our sins, but for the sins of all human beings (1 John 2:2). But many people do not yet understand this. Perhaps they have not yet heard the message of salvation, or they heard a garbled version that didn't make sense to them. For some reason, they have not believed the message.

It's like Jesus has paid their debts for them, and given them a huge bank account, but they haven't yet heard about it, or don't

quite believe it, or don't think they had any debts in the first place. Or it's like Jesus is throwing a party, and he gives them a ticket to get in, and yet some people decide not to come.

Or they are slaves working in the mud, and Jesus comes along and says, "I have purchased your freedom." Some people don't hear the message, some don't believe it, and some would rather stay in the mud than find out what freedom is. But others hear the message, believe it, and step out of the mud to see what a new life with Christ might be.

The message of salvation is received by faith — by trusting Jesus, by taking him at his word, by believing the good news. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). The gospel is effective for "the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). If we don't believe the message, we won't experience all its benefits.

Of course, there is more to "faith" than just believing certain facts about Jesus. The facts have some dramatic implications for us — we have to turn away from the life we've created in our own image and turn instead to God who made us in his. Jesus is saving us not just from a guilty verdict, but he is saving us from bad habits that enslave us and hurt us.

We should admit that we are sinners, that we haven't earned the right to eternal life, and that we don't deserve to share in an inheritance with Jesus Christ. We have to admit that we'll never be "good enough" for heaven — and we have to trust that the ticket Jesus gives us is indeed good enough to get us into the party. We have to trust that he did enough, in his death and resurrection, to pay our spiritual debts. We have to trust in his mercy and grace, admitting that there is no other way to get in.

A free offer

Let's bring the discussion back to our purpose in life. God says that he made us for a purpose, and that purpose is that we become like him. We are to be united with God's family, brothers

and sisters of Jesus, sharing in the family fortune! It's a wonderful purpose and wonderful promise.

But we haven't done our part. We haven't been as good as Jesus — that is, we haven't been perfect. Then what makes us think we'll get the other end of the deal — the eternal glory? The answer is that we have to trust God to be as merciful and full of grace as he says he is. He has made us for this purpose, and he is going to see it through! We can be confident, Paul says, that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

Jesus has paid the price and done the work, and his message — the message of the Bible — is that our salvation comes by what he has done for us. Experience (as well as Scripture) says that we can't trust in ourselves. Our only hope of salvation, of life, of becoming who God made us to be, is to trust in Christ. We can become like Christ because he, knowing all about our failings and shortcomings, says that he will bring it about!

Without Christ, life is pointless — we are stuck in the mud. But Jesus tells us that he has purchased our freedom, he can make us clean, he offers us a free ticket to the party and full rights in the family fortune. We can accept his offer, or we can dismiss it and stay in the mud.

Part 3: You're invited to a banquet!

Jesus looked like an insignificant carpenter in an insignificant village in an insignificant part of the Roman Empire. But now he is widely regarded as the most significant person who ever lived. Even nonbelievers recognize that he gave up his life to serve others, and this ideal of self-sacrificial love reaches into the depths of the human soul and touches the image of God within us.

He taught that people could find true and abundant life if they are willing to give up their own faltering hold on existence and follow him into the life of the kingdom of God. "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

We have nothing to lose but a pointless life, a frustrating life, and Jesus offers us a fulfilling, joyful, exciting and abounding life — for eternity. He invites us to give up pride and worry, and we gain peace of mind and joy of heart.

The path of Jesus

Jesus invites us to join him in his glory — but the journey to glory involves humility, putting other people before ourselves. We have to loosen our grip on the things of this life, and fasten our hold on Jesus. If we want a new life, we have to be willing to let go of the old one.

We were made to be like Jesus. But we are not just copying a respected hero. Christianity is not about religious rituals or even religious ideals. It is about God's love for humanity, his faithfulness to humanity, and his love and faithfulness made visible in human form in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, God demonstrates his grace; he knows that no matter how hard we try, we will never be good enough on our own. In Jesus, God gives us help; he sends the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name to live within us, to change us from the inside out. God is making us to be like himself; we are not trying to be Godlike on our own.

Jesus has for us an eternity of joy. Each individual, as a child in the family of God, has purpose and significance — an eternity of life. We were made for eternal glory, and the path to glory is Jesus, who himself is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6).

For Jesus, it meant a cross. He calls us to join him on that part of the journey, too. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). But the cross was followed by the resurrection to glory.

A celebration banquet

In some of his teaching stories, Jesus compared salvation to a banquet. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father threw a party for the rebellious son who finally came home. "Bring the fattened

calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:23-24). Jesus told the story to illustrate the point that all of heaven rejoices whenever anyone turns toward God (verse 7).

Jesus told another story about a man (illustrating God) who "was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests" (Luke 14:16). But surprisingly, many people ignored the invitation. "They all alike began to make excuses" (verse 18). Some were worried about their money, or their work; others were distracted by family matters (verses 18-20). So the master invited poor people instead (verse 21).

So it is with salvation. Jesus invites everyone, but some people are too busy with the cares of this world to respond. But those who are "poor," who realize there are more important things than money, sex, power and respect, are eager to come celebrate true life at Jesus' banquet.

You are invited!

Jesus told another story comparing salvation to a man (illustrating Jesus) who went on a journey. He "called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:14-15). The money could represent various things that Christ gives us; let's look at it here as representing the message of salvation.

After a long time, the master came back and asked for an accounting. Two of the servants showed that they had accomplished something with the master's money, and they were rewarded: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (verses 21, 23).

Yes, Jesus is inviting us to share in his happiness, to share in the eternal joys God has for us (Psalm 16:11). He is calling us to be like him, to be immortal, incorruptible, glorious and sinless. We

will have supernatural power. We will have a vitality, intelligence, creativity, power and love far beyond what we know now.

We can't do this on our own — we have to let God do it in us. We have to accept his invitation to get out of the mud, and come to his celebration banquet.

Have you thought about accepting his invitation? If you do, you may not see amazing results right away, but your life will definitely take on new significance and meaning. You'll gain purpose, you'll understand where you're going and why, and you'll be given new strength, new courage and great peace.

Jesus is inviting you to a party that lasts forever. Have you accepted the invitation?

Chapter 2

Our Relationship With God

God has created us “in his own image,” and this image is seen most clearly in Jesus Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, and God is in the process of conforming us to be more like Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 3:18). We will never be exactly like Jesus (he existed even before the beginning of time as part of the Godhead, and we’ll never do that!), but God offers us something as close as possible. We will be like Jesus.

We can’t be like Jesus by ourselves — God does the work within us. How does he do it? Let’s look at how the change begins: in our relationship with God.

No greater love

God offers us a relationship so close that he calls us friends, family — and even a bride. He uses these figures of speech to describe how much he loves us. “I no longer call you servants,” Jesus told his disciples. “Instead, I have called you friends” (John 15:15). We can be like Abraham, “God’s friend” (James 2:23).

We are also called God’s children, and “Jesus is not ashamed to call [us] brothers” (Hebrews 2:11). “How great is the love the

Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). Maybe it isn’t obvious right now, but it will be evident when Christ returns. “When he appears, we shall be like him” (verse 2).

God calls us his children, he gives us an eternal inheritance, he invites us into the throne room as often as we want, and he loves us with a love that will never fail. “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:15-17).

God loves us and accepts the responsibility of providing our needs, protecting us, and helping us grow toward maturity. And in the end, we get a fabulous inheritance from the wealthiest Dad in the universe!

Paul used a marriage analogy when he wrote that he had “promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Revelation uses a similar figure of speech when it predicts the “wedding of the Lamb,” when Jesus (the Lamb) and his people (the bride) are joined forever and ever (Revelation 19:7; John 1:29).

What more could we say of his love for us? Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

In Jesus, God has shown us how much he loves us. He did this while we were sinners, so there is nothing we can do that will ever take his love away. He loves us even when we are sinners. We are assured of his constant love. And if he did this when we were sinners, we can be confident that he will complete our salvation (verse 10). His love will never fail. This is the rock-solid basis for our fellowship with God.

Just like Jesus

We are to be like Jesus, and Jesus set an example for us. We can look to Jesus to learn more about our relationship with God the Father.

For some people, “Father” (or “Parent”) brings only negative memories. But when God reveals himself as a Father, he does not want to cause fear or resentment. Rather, he wants to remind us of protection, of giving us our needs, of a love that is secure. Human parents ought to have these qualities, but everyone falls short of the ideal, and some are even evil. But God the Father is perfect, and we should let the Bible describe him; we should not pre-judge him by our experiences with defective parents. We should imagine the best father possible, and be assured that God is even better than that.

Jesus was confident that the Father loved him (John 3:35; 5:20). He was also confident that God, as a perfect Father, would provide his needs. Don’t worry about your life, he told his disciples, or your food and clothing. God takes care of the birds and the flowers; he will take care of you, too (Matthew 6:28-34). Jesus depended on his Father, relied on him. He prayed not as a formality, but because he needed help from God. We do, too.

Jesus respected the Father, honored him, was loyal to him and obedient to him. Shortly before Jesus was crucified, he prayed for a way to escape: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.” But he also added, “Yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus trusted his Father to take care of him, even after death.

God is a Father to us, too. He loves us, provides for us, and cares about us. Granted, there are times in our lives when we do not understand why he is allowing us to suffer, but even then, God asks us to trust him. By sending Jesus to die and be raised for us, he has already shown himself to be trustworthy.

We aren’t all-wise, and we can’t expect to understand

everything. It should not be too surprising that we don't understand all suffering, even though we'd like to understand it. But understanding it doesn't necessarily make it go away. Jesus knew why he had to suffer and die, and he still had to do it.

If God allowed Jesus to suffer, we can be sure that suffering is for some reason a necessary part of God's plan; we can also be sure that Jesus understands what we are going through. If God loves us so much that he sent his Son to die for us, we can be sure that he won't stop loving us now.

But what choice do we have? Christians have trials; unbelievers have trials, too. Our choice is not whether to suffer, but whether to trust God. We need to be like Jesus.

Love and loyalty

God wants us to love him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength (Mark 12:30). He loves us and has given us life; we are to love him and be thankful for the good things he gives. He is loyal to us; we are to be loyal to him. We are to depend on him, rather than money or government or any other unreliable authorities.

Why does God want our loyalty? Not for his own benefit — he doesn't need us. Rather, he wants our loyalty for our benefit. God wants the best for us, and he knows that when we are disloyal to him, we are going to get hurt. When we trust in something that's not trustworthy, we are going to suffer, and God doesn't want us to do any more of that than is necessary.

God tells us to not murder, steal or commit adultery. These are not arbitrary rules, but instructions on how to avoid potentially painful problems. In effect, God tells us not to play with poison — not to restrict our freedom, but so that we can avoid danger. We can either trust him, or we can take matters into our own hands and suffer. God knows what works best, and he cares enough about us to tell us what we should avoid. If we disobey, God still loves us, but we suffer the results.

When we realize that God loves us, we accept that his

commands are for our own good, and we trust that he knows more about life than we do. It is simply a wise policy to learn to do what he says, and foolish to disobey. That is a practical application of trusting God, of being loyal to him.

Our purpose is praise

Our love and loyalty to God should be so great that we worship him — praise him, adore him, want to be like him, and desire to do whatever he says. Peter writes that we are chosen for this purpose: “that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

God does not assign us this job because he likes to hear flattery. He assigns us this because we are the ones who benefit from it. It is good for *us* to be reminded of God’s power, grace, promises and faithfulness. The better we know God, the more we will see that he is worthy of praise. God has designed us in such a way that we will find life most enjoyable, and most satisfying, when we are doing what he created us to do.

We worship God in church, but worship is much more than that. We worship him throughout the week — whenever we pray, whenever we obey him rather than acting selfishly, whenever we trust in him. We do not trust in our works, but we can use them as a form of worship: “Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:16).

Our goal is to let God change us so that we are more like Christ. Worship is the first step. As we acknowledge his power and wisdom, as we are reminded of his faithfulness, we surrender ourselves to him, to let him do what he wants in us. In worship, we are already imitating Christ — doing the will of the Father, trusting in him, honoring him, loving him with all our strength.

If we want to enjoy eternal life in the presence of God, we need to begin to enjoy his presence even now. Our transformation into Christlike people begins with our relationship with God. Next, we’ll look at how it affects our relationship with others. God puts us into a family, and there we learn more about being like Jesus.

Chapter 3

Living Like Jesus in the Family of God

How do we respond to God's grace? One way that we respond is by extending grace to others, in our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. If we are going to live with God forever, we will also be living with each other forever. We were designed not for eternal isolation, but for living together and interacting with one another. Life's greatest joys come in our relationships with other people.

Life's greatest hurts come from other people, too. So if eternal life is going to be happy, we need to learn to get along with people without hurting them. The essential ingredient we need here is love. The most important commandment, Jesus said, is to love God, and the second-most-important command is, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

If we are going to be like Jesus, we need to love people — even people who are hard to love. Jesus set the example for us, coming to die even for the people who hated him. As good parents know, love means a willingness to be inconvenienced, a willingness to set aside our own concerns to attend to the needs of

someone else. Love is a lot more than good feelings — it must also include good actions.

Willing to serve

God is good not because he is powerful, but because he is good. He always uses his power to help other people, not to serve himself. We praise people who risk their lives to save others; we do not praise people who had the power but refused to use it. We admire self-sacrifice, not selfishness.

Jesus came to serve, not to lord it over people (Matthew 20:28). He told his disciples they should not be like power-hungry rulers, but should set an example by helping people. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (verse 26). Jesus shows us what the Father is like (John 14:9) — not just what he was like 2,000 years ago, but what he is like all the time.

True greatness is not in power, but in service. God sets the example; as does Jesus. The meaning of life is not in having authority over others, but in helping people. That is the only way that eternal life is going to be enjoyable for everyone.

Jesus set many examples of service. A special one happened the evening before his crucifixion. He got down and washed the 12 disciples’ feet as a lesson in humility and service. “I have set you an example,” he said, “that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). Don’t consider yourself too important to kneel down and help somebody. Leaders in the church should be servants.

Paul said we should “serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13). “Carry each other’s burdens,” he wrote, “and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

If we are selfish, we will never be satisfied, but if we serve, we will find it self-rewarding. We are more satisfied when we help than when we take. Jesus told us this because it is so unlike the assumptions that most people make.

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11). If we want to be like Jesus, if we want to have a meaningful life, then we need to serve others.

Serving in the church

One way that we serve others is by being active participants in a community of believers — a church. No church is perfect, just like no person is perfect, but the church is something that God designed to help us on our journey with Jesus. The church teaches us about Jesus, reminds us of his grace and promises, and gives us opportunities to worship together. The church helps us keep our purpose in focus.

The church also gives us opportunities to exercise patience and forgiveness. We may not like these “opportunities,” but they still help us learn to be more like Jesus. Paul reminds us of the example we follow: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13). “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Educators know that we learn by listening, but we learn much more when we participate. Jesus taught his disciples not just in words, and not just in his example, but also by giving them work to do. “He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2). After his resurrection, he again assigned them work: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). And they learned as they went.

If you want to be like Jesus, get involved in his work. He left it to us, not because we could do a better job than anyone else, but because it is for our good. We will learn more, and be changed more, by getting involved.

Different talents

Have you ever noticed that different people have different strengths? Believing in Jesus does not eliminate our differences. Being like Christ does not mean that we all have to look alike, dress alike and act alike. In fact, God purposely gives different strengths to different people (1 Corinthians 12:11). We are not to brag about our abilities, nor wish we had someone else's (verses 14-26). Rather, we are to use our skills "for the common good" (verse 7).

Some people are very talented, but no one has all the talents that society needs. God makes sure that everybody is lacking something, so that we learn to work together. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10). The church is a great place to learn to be like Jesus by serving other people.

We are to serve people's physical needs, and also their spiritual needs. One of the biggest spiritual needs that this world has is the message of the salvation that we have been given in Jesus Christ. The church is called to take this message to the world; each believer has a message that can encourage and help many others, and we will become more like Jesus if we become less self-conscious and more willing to share the message.

Why do we share the gospel? It is not a means of getting brownie points with God. It is not a way for us to brag about how good we are. Rather, it is a way to serve others, to help them with one of their most serious needs in life.

People need to know that God loves them, that their lives have meaning and purpose, that there really is hope even when physical life seems pointless. God has good news for them, and we share it because people need it.

Of course, it is deeply satisfying to be used by God to help someone else. Sharing the gospel gives us a tremendous sense of

significance, because we are taking part in a work of eternal worth, sharing in the work of God himself. That's part of what it means to be like God, to be like Jesus. God made us in such a way that we would find our deepest satisfactions in doing the work that he himself does. We were made for this!

Relationships of grace

We are saved by grace, not by our works. God sent Jesus to die for us, and he forgives us, not on the basis of our works, but because of his mercy. Now, if God is like that, and we were born to be like God, what does this say about our relationships with one another? It totally transforms them!

If we follow Jesus, grace needs to fill our families, our friendships and our workplaces. Being like Jesus means that we are not always demanding to get our own way. We are not bragging about ourselves or insulting others. Paul describes the results of God at work in our lives: "The fruit of [God's] Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

"Honor one another above yourselves," Paul writes (Romans 12:10). "Live in harmony with one another" (verse 16). "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).

"Encourage one another and build each other up.... Always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else" (1 Thessalonians 5:11, 15).

Husbands, how would it make a difference in the way you treat your wife? (See Ephesians 5:25.) Wives, how would it affect you? (See verse 22.) Those who are employed, how would it affect your work? (See Ephesians 6:5-8.)

We all start out unlike Jesus. We start as sinners, as enemies of God, as selfish, self-seeking people. And yet that is precisely what we need to be saved from, to be rescued from. So there's a lot of changing that needs to happen.

If we are to be like Jesus, our relationships may have to change a lot. It won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight. It takes time, so we need patience with the process, both in ourselves and in others. We need faith that God will finish the work he has started in us.

God has the most fulfilled, most satisfying life possible — and he wants us to enjoy eternal life, too. He wants us to be like he is. God is “compassionate and gracious ... slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7).

Chapter 4

Learning to Be Like Christ in Everyday Life

We were made to be like Jesus — but how is that different than trying to be like Buddha or Confucius? How is Christianity different from other religions that tell people to imitate a highly respected role model? It is different in several ways.

First, most religions teach some form of works as the path of salvation — saying the right prayers, doing the right things, hoping it will be enough. They imply that people can be good enough if they try hard enough.

But Christianity teaches that we all need grace because we cannot be good enough no matter how hard we try. The point of grace, and of Jesus' sacrifice, is that no amount of good works or religious deeds can ever save anyone. If such a path could have been designed, then God would have done it (Galatians 3:21). The Christian gospel teaches that no one can earn salvation, and yet it is available to all, because Jesus gives it to us.

Second, most religions tell us to change our behavior, and they expect us to supply all the effort. Christianity says that God himself will supply the power we need to change our lives. We humans have gotten ourselves into this mess, and we can't rescue

ourselves. The power of salvation must come from God.

We are not trying to transform ourselves into the image of Christ — we want to let God do it in us. The Bible describes this as the Holy Spirit living in us, God living in us, or Jesus Christ living in us. The power to change our behavior comes from him, not from within ourselves. It is his work, not anything we can take credit for.

Third, most religions motivate people through threats and desire for reward. Christianity motivates us through grace and love. We obey God not out of fear, but out of love and thankfulness for what he has done. And we are confident that he has given us the best instructions possible on how to live.

Christianity says that we were created for a purpose, and that purpose is eternal happiness living with a supremely loving God (Psalm 16:11). Jesus is not just an example of how we ought to live — he is also an example of what salvation means. He lives in eternal glory, and says that we can join him in that glory, if we trust him.

Spiritual growth

Over the centuries, Christians have found several ways to let God do his work in our lives. God does not force us to love him — love by definition has to be willingly given; it cannot be programmed into us or forced out of us. We have to choose it. God works in us as we submit to him. “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

How do we invite God to do his work in our lives? How do we become more like Jesus Christ? In several ways:

In worship, we are reminded of God’s greatness, his mercy and his desire to do good in our lives. We are reminded that we can trust him and that we depend on him, just as Jesus did.

In prayer, we acknowledge that we depend on God, and we ask him for the help we need — needs such as food, intervention, and spiritual change. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in

everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

In Bible study, we read and think about the works and words of God. Jesus studied Scripture and used its words to help him resist temptations (Matthew 4:1-11). He said that humans do “not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (verse 4). Spiritual life needs spiritual nourishment.

In the church, we interact with other people in the same Christ-focused training program. We learn from our interactions about how to express love, and we grow in appreciation for people who have talents and abilities different from our own. Jesus created the church not just to preach the gospel, but to help us grow, because that is also part of his work and purpose.

In service, in helping others, we act the way Jesus would. We learn by experience that service gives us more life satisfaction than selfishness does. Being involved in the work of God is the most satisfying feeling of all, for it will be of eternal value. When we die, we can’t take physical things with us, but we can take relationships with us and resume them in the next life.

Toil and trouble

In the day-to-day experiences of life, we have opportunities to learn to be like Jesus, to choose to be patient, to be considerate, to help others, to pray. On the job and in our homes, Jesus has something to say about what we do.

What about the trials and difficulties of life? We wish they’d go away, but Jesus never promised that. Instead, he promised us problems: “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20).

God uses our difficulties as opportunities for us to learn. Even Jesus had to experience troubles. “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). If even Jesus had to learn through suffering, we can expect it to be part of

our training program, too.

We will experience problems in life whether or not we follow Jesus. Our choice is not whether to have problems, but whether we learn from those problems. Do we react to them the way Jesus would, or do we become bitter and seek revenge? We learn more about love when we love people who are hard to love; we learn more about forgiveness when people sin against us. Our character is shaped more like Jesus not so much in good times, but in difficult times.

We do not always understand why God allows people to suffer. We may not see any good in it, or any lesson to learn. But God assures us 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). We may not know how — we just have to trust him.

Whatever the trial, we can at least be assured of this: “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (verse 18). We can be confident, even in our trials, that God has something wonderful planned for us. Our trials are only temporary, but the glory will last forever!

Enemies of spiritual growth

The Bible warns us that several things can stifle the work God is doing in our lives. We can resist those enemies, but it will take some effort.

In Luke 8, Jesus told a story about seeds in different types of soil. In his story, the seed represented the word of God (verse 11). Some people receive the gospel message with joy. “They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away” (verse 13). They expected Christianity to be smooth sailing, but that is not what Jesus promises. “When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away” (Matthew 13:21).

Another group of people are like seeds that fell among weeds. Although the message of Jesus began to grow in their lives, it was

eventually choked out by weeds. “As they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14).

Some people are so distracted by the things of this world, that they fail to think about eternal life. The gospel has no results in their lives because they ignore it — they are too “busy” to give eternity any time. Either they are amusing themselves with wealth, or they are frustrating themselves trying to get wealth (see also 1 John 2:16-17). Either way, they don’t give God any time. They are choosing mortal life instead of eternal life.

However, some people respond well to the message: “The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by perseverance produce a crop” (Luke 8:15). Perseverance helps us grow and produce fruit. Our choices make a difference in what the gospel does in our lives.

We need to value the eternal life that Jesus offers us — and we need to act like it is more valuable than the temporary rewards of this mortal life. We should love God more than we love money, physical pleasures, or the success that this world offers. Those things are temporary, so we need to keep our eyes on the goal of eternal life, with eternal pleasures and eternal significance.

We have a choice. If we want a meaningful life, a satisfying life, an enjoyable life, then we need to look to Jesus as our model, and as the power that can change our life.

God wants us to live forever in love and joy, and we need to trust him to do the work that he has already begun. He’s the one who created us to be “in his own image”; he’s the one who sent Jesus to guarantee it for us; we can be sure that he will finish his work in our lives. Trust him, and open your life to let him work more powerfully!

Chapter 5

Living the Trinitarian Life

We all have two problems. The first problem is sin, and the second is death.

“Sin” is generally considered a *religious* word; it might be defined as “doing something that God doesn’t like.” But, even if we take God out of the picture, we still have a problem, because we do things that we don’t like. We don’t like lying, cheating and stealing, and yet, sometimes we *do* things like that. We sometimes say things to our friends that we wish we hadn’t.

Well, nobody’s perfect — and that’s my point. We all do things that we wish we hadn’t. We have a *problem* with the way we live. We all want good interpersonal relationships, but all of us sometimes do things that hurt other people’s feelings.

Sometimes we do it innocently, sometimes we do it because we’re angry, sometimes we do it to their face and sometimes we do it behind their back. We say things about somebody that we wouldn’t have said if they were there in person, and other people say things about us that they wouldn’t say to our face, and it hurts.

So, whether you call it sin or something else, we’ve got problems with the way we live. We are not as good as we would like to be.

Now, our second problem is that we are going to die. Our

imperfect life is going to come to an end — and most people try to put that off as long as possible. Life has its ups and downs, and we'd really like to experience a few more "ups." Sure, life has some unpleasant moments, but it also has some really good ones, and most of us would like to figure out a way to get more of those good moments, and figure out a way that they don't have to stop.

So our basic problems are, the way we live, and the way we die. That pretty much sums up what life is.

Who will rescue us?

People have been working on these problems for thousands of years, and basically, the nature of the problems has not changed, and I for one do not think that people are going to solve these problems. So I can really identify with the apostle Paul. In Romans 7, he describes a struggle with doing bad stuff even when he wants to do good, and after going on and on about this struggle he finally exclaims, "O wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Well, who indeed? Paul says that *Christ* will rescue him — and maybe he's right. Maybe I need to bring God back into the picture. I sure know that I can't fix my problems by myself. I can't rescue myself from death, and I can't even rescue myself from the wrong inclinations that are inside of me.

Most religions just throw people back on their own strength. Just work harder, they say. Do this, do that, and do it for a really long time, and you might be OK.

I've got a problem with that approach: It doesn't work. First, I don't "do it" very well, and after that, I am still going to die. I still have the same two problems. I need something that helps me *in this life*, and helps me in the *next life*.

The Bible says that we are rescued by God from both of these problems. He sent Jesus 1) to rescue us from death, and 2) he sends the Holy Spirit to rescue us from the evil within. He helps us live in a better way, and he assures us that we will live forever.

Now, since we've all got these same two problems, and the Bible describes a solution to these two problems, I suggest that we take a look at what the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 2.

In this letter, Paul has been talking about how God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him a place of power in the heavens — power over everything else. This is the kind of power that God uses for us. Paul sees a parallel between what God did for Jesus Christ, and what he is doing in *us*, in our lives. In chapter 2, he starts to focus on what God is doing inside of us: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live... when you followed the ways of this world...” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

That's an interesting combination of words — they were dead when they used to live. Obviously, Paul is using the word “dead” here as a metaphor. The people were not dead in the sense that their heart had stopped beating and their brains had stopped functioning. But Paul says that they were dead in their behavior, in the way that they were doing stuff that God says is not part of an authentic life.

God wants us to be alive, not dead. The purpose of life is *to live* — to live *as life is defined by God*. He is offering us *life* rather than death — but life means a lot more than a heartbeat and a brain wave. God is not just offering us a biochemical existence — he has created us for much more than that.

Think of a steer, for example — its life is not much more than eating grass, eliminating waste, gaining weight, and eventually going to the slaughterhouse. Or think of a fish — its life is not much more than looking for food, looking out for predators, gaining weight, and eventually being eaten by something or another.

Human life should be more than that, because God *made us* for something more than that. The Bible tells us that God made humans in *his own image*; we have been made to be a bit like God.

God wants us to have a life that is somewhat like *his* life. He wants us to *share* in that life; he wants to share that life with us.

God's life

What is God's life like? What was God's life like before he created us? What was his life like before he created the universe? What was God's life like before he created anything at all? What was it like when *God* was all that there was?

The insight of Christianity is that there is only one God — there is an ultimate unity to the entire universe — but this one God is complex rather than simplistic. God is one *being*, but God is three *persons* in one being. These three persons are called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and there is a fundamental unity to the three persons.

And how did this triune God live?

God lived in love. There was love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They loved each other. The Bible tells us that God is love, that this is his most basic characteristic. But if God were only one person, he could not be love, because love is defined as care and concern for something *other* than self, and before the creation, there was nothing *other* than God. But since God is three persons within an overall unity, there can be love *within* God, and indeed, there is. The Trinitarian life is one of *love*.

This is the nature of God's life, the nature of the life that he wants to share with us. The life that he wants *us* to have is not just a biochemical existence — he wants us to have a life that is characterized by love — a life of joy and kindness and appreciation.

This is the life God wants us to have, too. God want *us* to have the Trinitarian life, and the Bible says that the Father is in us, the Son is in us, and the Holy Spirit is in us, bringing that kind of life to us, transforming the way we live now, and transforming our future life, as well.

I wish he would do it all a lot faster than he does, but I have to

admit that he knows a whole lot more about it than I do, so I need to be patient with the way it works. Yes, patience is one of the things I need to have.

Living like animals

Paul says that living people were dead in the way that they were living. They were living in a selfish way, and not experiencing life the way that God meant it to be, and they didn't have life according to the way that God defines it, and that is why Paul calls the people "dead" in their transgressions and sins. They were falling short of the life God wants for his people, and they were on a path to death.

Their so-called life wasn't much more than eating and drinking and then dying, like a cow or a fish. As Paul says, they were following the ways of the world, living pretty much like everybody else around them. We've all been there, and done that, and sometimes we do it again.

If we look around at the world, we see the strong exploiting the weak; we see violence, misery, drudgery; we see people thinking, "There's got to be more to life than this," and other people are thinking, "There *is nothing* more to life than this." Some will tell you that human life is no better than animal life, and some people end up living pretty much like animals.

Some people live like plant-eaters, and some live like predators, and if humans are no better than animals, there's really no reason to say that one lifestyle is better than the other. If we are just another animal, we really can't say that it's wrong to be like a shark, or a weasel, or a crocodile.

But the Bible says, No, we are not an animal. There is more to life than that. We are not supposed to pattern our life after an animal — we are made in the image of God, and we are supposed to pattern our life after the God who has *love* as his central characteristic.

But we can't do that on our own — we need *God to live in us*,

and that's what the Holy Spirit does. He brings the Trinitarian life, the divine life, the life of love and kindness, into us, and this is what Paul calls real life, the life that will make eternity so enjoyable.

There's a lot more to eternal life than just living forever and ever. We don't just need to escape death and live longer and longer — we also need *a change in the way we live*, and that's one of the reasons that Jesus is really good news, because he gives us both.

A spiritual problem

Paul says that if we just do what everybody else is doing, if we just go along with the crowd, then we are dead. The people in Ephesus had been like that. And it's not just that they were following other people — Paul says in verse 2 that they were also following the ways “of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

So this is not just a human problem — there is some spiritual power at work *in* humanity. Paul doesn't say much about it right here. In other places he writes that we are enslaved by sin, as if sin itself is an alien power that can hold us captive, that can *hijack* our minds, that can trick us into doing what it wants.

That's why, even after we can figure out that *love* is a better way to live than selfishness is, we just can't do it on our own. We might do it right part of the time, but we can't do it *all* the time. We are up against some alien spiritual power. Just exactly what it is and how it works, doesn't matter right now, because Christ gives us power over it.

Paul says that this alien spirit is still working in the people who are disobedient. “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (verse 3). We were once part of the disobedient group, with a basically selfish life, just doing whatever we wanted to do. On our own, by nature, we were “objects of wrath.”

Literally, it says we were “children of wrath,” and I’m not sure what that means. If it were here by itself, I might think that “wrath” means that God was angry at us. But that interpretation doesn’t work, because the very next verse says that God is *not* angry at us. Maybe he has a *right* to be angry at us, and if he were like *us*, he *would* be angry at us, but the fact is that God doesn’t want to punish us — what he *wants* is to rescue us from the problems of sin and death.

Saved by grace

Verses 4 and 5: “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.”

God made us for a particular purpose, and he is not going to give up on that. He is going to rescue us from both forms of death. He is going to rescue us from the deadly way that we live, and from death itself. Sin leads to death, and if God fixes one of those problems, the other will be fixed as well. The two go together; they are just different sides of the same coin.

But the rescue operation does not come from anger, or from threats of punishment if we don’t measure up — it comes only through love, mercy, and grace. That’s because *that* is the sort of life that God has, and it’s the sort of life that he wants to share with us. It *has* to be done with mercy and grace because that is the nature of the Trinitarian life, not only of God, but also the life that he wants us to have. And you can’t get love as a result if you are sowing the seeds of anger and vengeance.

This is the unique message of the gospel: *God has done this for us*, he saved us by his grace, even when we were dead in our transgressions. Even when we were hopelessly ensnared in the wrong way of life, God made us alive with Christ. It was certainly not what we deserved — it was a *gift* — that’s what “grace” means.

And Paul puts this *in the past tense* — God has already made

us alive. He has given us a new life, a life that is now defined by Jesus Christ rather than by the desires of the flesh or ways of this world.

As it says in Colossians, our lives are now *hidden* in Christ. That word “hidden” is a helpful one, because we don’t always *see* ourselves in this new life. Sometimes we see the old life, still living selfishly, but the gospel tells us that the new life is in us, too.

God has made us alive with Christ. God’s Spirit lives within us, allowing us to share in and participate in the Trinitarian life, the love that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share with each other and want to share with us as well. God is already doing it in us, communicating it to us, building it in us.

Already living with Christ

But he has done more than that — verse 6 tells us “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

Notice again that this is in the *past* tense. God has already raised us up, given us a new life instead of our old dead one, and placed us with Christ. As his gift to us, God has already united us to Christ, even before we were aware of it, and we are seated with Christ, on a throne, in the heavenly places, even before we were aware of it.

Now, we usually think about heaven as being “up,” but it’s not really “up” at all. Heaven is simply where God is, and God is omnipresent — he is everywhere all at once. God is *here*, just as much as he is in the sky, just as much, or maybe even *more*, than he is in outer space. Some people have compared it to another dimension — a dimension that we cannot see but is nevertheless all around us.

No matter how we might describe it, Paul’s point is that we are already living with Christ, already sharing in his life and his privileges. Salvation means not just a rescue from death, not just a favorable verdict on some future day of judgment, but it also

affects our lives *right now*. We are already with Christ, and he is with us, and our lives should reflect that.

Verse 7 tells us why God did this: “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.” We will be a permanent testimony to God’s generosity — and I think that we will also be the continuing *recipients* of his generosity. He will *continue* to be gracious toward us in the coming ages, because that’s the sort of being that he is, and he couldn’t do that in the future, unless he gives us the grace we need now, for us to even be *alive* in coming ages.

The same kindness that he has already shown us in Jesus Christ, will continue to be shown to us in coming ages. That’s because God doesn’t change. He is love and he will continue to be love. He is merciful and will continue to be merciful. He is generous and will continue to be generous. What we have seen in Jesus is exactly what God is, and God will continue to be like that for all eternity.

Not forced upon us

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

God has saved us as a gift; it is not something that we could earn or deserve. We could never be good enough on our own to earn the right to live with God forever. Of ourselves, we don’t have the right way of life, and we don’t have the right *length* of life. It’s those same two problems. But God has done it, as a gift, and we receive it by faith, simply by accepting it and believing it.

God does not force himself on us. We don’t *have* to live in the way of love if we don’t want to. Love, by its very nature, cannot be forced on anybody. God tells us it’s *available*, and he is available, and he’s willing to live in us and help us, but it doesn’t do us any good unless we believe it, unless we want it. It’s waiting there for

us, if we accept it, but the gospel is an announcement that it's there. The deed has been done, the sins have been paid for and forgiven, the Holy Spirit is already here, and God offers for us to share in his life — but he doesn't force it on us. We need to respond.

But even if we respond in faith, we can't brag about that as if *we* have somehow done something special. Faith is also a gift of God. He makes faith available to us, but he doesn't force us to use it. We *can*, if we want to, if we are tired of the pointless old life that everybody else has.

If we are tired of living in the ways of death, we can have life, the way of true life, the way that God intended, the life that comes from the Father, through the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Living as if life will last forever

If we are going to live forever, then we need to live in such a way that it will be enjoyable for everyone forever, and the only way that's going to happen is if we love one another.

I'm not talking about some kind of syrupy romance. Our culture uses the word "love" quite a bit, but they often don't mean what they are saying. They are talking about lust, or a temporary fascination. When the Bible talks about love, it's talking about a self-sacrificial generosity, a love that is shown to us most clearly by Jesus, by what *he* did in his life and in his death.

Biblical love is not just being nice to the people we like, or to the people who like us — it is being nice even to the people who don't like us — it is a willingness to help even our enemies.

This is countercultural, and people who live like this are sometimes taken advantage of, sometimes abused, sometimes killed. So in order to continue in the way of love, even in the face of a threat of death, we need some sort of assurance that there is life beyond death. We need some assurance that life is more than what we can see.

For illustration, let's suppose that we are all stranded in the

desert with one gallon of water. If we share the water, it's not going to be enough for anybody — we will all die of dehydration. But if I steal the water and take it all for myself, it will be enough for me to get out of the desert and save my life. Everybody else will die, but I will live. So I am faced with a choice: either I do something evil, or I die.

Is there *anything* that can motivate me to do what is right, even if it means that I'm going to die?

Well, life after death could make a difference. If I had some evidence that I was going to live again, then perhaps I might be willing to do the right thing in *this* life. If I had longer-range vision, then maybe I'd have more motive for doing what's right. Maybe it would help if I had evidence that death had been conquered — if somebody actually came back from the dead and had a life that surpassed the kind of life that we know about.

And that, of course, is what we have in Jesus Christ. *But it doesn't do us any good unless we believe it.* We have to believe that it happened, and that it has some relevance to us today.

Now, even if we are on the right path, and headed in the right direction, we are going to make some mistakes. So, we need some sort of assurance that our mistakes do not *disqualify* us from the hope that we are aiming for. And Jesus *gives* us that assurance, too, that forgiveness is continually available, because he has already paid for *all* our sins.

We need assurance that the twin problems of sin and death have been taken care of, and the gospel gives us that assurance. But God doesn't force this solution on us, and it doesn't do us any good unless we believe it, unless we accept the gift that he has given us.

So the plan that began with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is *implemented* by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father sent the Son to conquer death on our behalf, so that we can be raised with him to new life. And he sends the Holy Spirit to live within us

to combat the sinful tendencies that are still inside us. So he tackles the problems of sin and death.

Created for a purpose

Verse 10 tells us *why* God does this: “*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” He saves us by grace because *we are his workmanship* — that is, he created us — and he is not going to let his creation go to waste. He is going to rescue what he has made.

And as we learn elsewhere, none of this caught God by surprise. He knew all along that this was going to happen, and he knew ahead of time *how* he was going to fix it. He knew how much it was going to cost him, and he decided ahead of time that he was going to pay it.

Why? Because he was motivated by love. He wanted to create *life*, life like himself, a life that is characterized by love — love that leads to good works. God wants us to do good works not as an end in themselves, not as the ultimate purpose of life, and certainly not as payment for salvation, but simply because “good works” is *a description of what that life will look like*.

There is no contradiction between grace and good works. Paul includes them both here in the space of three verses. He says we were created for good works, but we cannot be saved *by* good works. Good works are the *result* and the *purpose*, but not the cause of salvation.

Actually, good works are the reason that we *need* salvation by grace. We were created to do good works, but we fall short of the purpose for which we have been created. Our own works do not earn us salvation — indeed, our works include works of sin, works of death, works for which we need to be forgiven, and from which we need to be rescued.

But the plan of salvation does not mean that God has abandoned his original goal for us. He still wants us to have a life

of love, a life of good works, and he is working *in* our lives to bring that about. So he forgives our sins, and gives us grace, and he *continues* to give us grace. He assures us that he will give us grace *all the way into eternal life*, and he assures us that he lives within us, so that our lives can be energized by the Holy Spirit to do the good works which God has prepared for us to do.

But God does not force this on us. He tells us that this is what life is for — and indeed, a little thought will tell us that eternal life would not be very good unless it were something like this, characterized by love rather than selfishness, characterized by good works instead of bad ones. This is what God has prepared for us, that we might share in the life of God, the Trinitarian life, the **love** that is shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Choose life

God has given this life to us as a gift, but he has also given us *the power to choose*. We can choose this life, or we can put it off. We can accept what he gives, or we can figuratively put it on the shelf without using it at all.

Many of us have already accepted the gift, and have begun to let it work in our lives. We still have the twin problems of sin and death, but we are also confident that Christ has overcome both of those problems, and we are promised that he is working in us, and he says that we will have an eternity in which we are freed from both problems.

Others have yet to make that decision, and if that's you, I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage you to accept what God has given. It's like God said through Moses long ago: I set before you life and death. So *choose life*, that it may go well with you, and with your children.

If you are dead in trespasses and sins, and would like to be raised up with Jesus Christ to a new life, a life in which God shares his life with you, a life characterized by love for others, then I encourage you to say "yes" to God, and I encourage you to tell

somebody else about it.

I also encourage you to be baptized to symbolize this transition in your life. The Bible says that baptism symbolizes the death of your old self, and it symbolizes a *new life* for you, a life that's been brought into the sphere of the Trinitarian life, a life in which *love* prevails, not only in this life but also into an eternity with God.

Jesus Christ has conquered both sin and death, and as our Savior, he offers us love and life — not only his love for us, but also his kind of love *living in us*, transforming us, fashioning us for the purpose for which we were created in the first place: a life that is good, and a life that we can enjoy forever.

Chapter 6

Looking for a Better Life

America is full of immigrants. Many Americans were born in a different nation, and moved to America at some point in their life. Or maybe it was their great-great grandparents who moved to America from “the old country.” Even if we are Native Americans, if we go back far enough, we will see that our ancestors came to this land from somewhere else. And many people have moved from one state to another.

Now, whether it was us or our ancestors, why did we move? I think in most cases, it’s because we thought our life here would be better than if we lived somewhere else. We were all looking for a better life. We would have more good things *here*, than wherever we were before. A better job, a better place to live, better clothes, and other amenities.

Life could be better

But I suggest that we need to look for a better life in a different sense: we need to be better people. We need to live in a better way. We need to help others, and to have better relationships with others. We not only want a higher standard of living, we also want a higher standard of *life*. We want life to be more than it presently is.

We know that God wants to give us a better life — and I do mean “give.” Ephesians 2 tells us that we are saved by grace. But what then? We have a new life in Christ, but what does that look like in real life? What does it look like in our friendships and relationships with other people?

Let’s look at another passage in the book of Ephesians to see how the apostle Paul describes what the good life is like. Let’s go to chapter 4, starting in verse 22.

Paul tells his readers — and that includes us today — “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.”

Paul is describing here a change in behavior. The old way was corrupted — it was rotten — and the problem was caused by the way we think. We wanted stuff that wasn’t good for us. We deceived ourselves into thinking that happiness comes from material goods, from sensual pleasures, from thinking of ourselves as better than other people, from winning the competitions we had with other people.

It was basically a selfish approach to life, and it ended up hurting other people, hurting our relationships, and hurting us, as well. And so Paul says that in Christ, we have been taught to put off our old ways, and find a new approach to life.

Desires that don’t deceive

Verses 23 and 24: “to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” So, since the problem with the old way of life was in our *desires*, the solution involves a new attitude — we need to set our hearts on something different. We need to have desires that do not deceive us — we need to want things that are really *better* for us.

Paul says here that our new self is created to be like God — that is the purpose for which we were made in the first place, and that is what our new self in Christ should look like. We have been

created to be like God. Not in power or brilliance, but in righteousness, in the sense of doing what is right.

We were made for that purpose. God wants us to live with him forever, and he is telling us what that sort of life is like. This is what we call the Trinitarian life, the way that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live with one another. If we had to describe it in one word, we could call it righteousness — or we could also say holiness — or love, joy, peace, faithfulness, meekness and kindness.

This is the way that life works best. If we are going to live forever, and that's what God is offering us, then we need to live in such a way that we are not going to cause problems for other people. If we are supposed to be like God is in righteousness, then we need to find out what he's like, and then we need to be like that, too.

But as Paul tells us in other places, we cannot be like God all by ourselves — it comes only from God living in us. God is the one who does it; our role is to agree to what he wants to do in our lives.

Telling the truth

That's the overview. Paul gives us some specific examples starting in verse 25: "Therefore [that is, because we have been created to be like God], each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

The first thing Paul mentions is that we need to tell the truth. We should stop trying to deceive other people, because that messes up relationships. It destroys trust, but relationships need trust. We cannot have long-range loyalty without truth and trust. When we deceive people and they find out, they feel betrayed and hurt.

In eternity, we won't need jobs and houses and clothing and other material things. We won't worry about our health or all sorts of other stuff. But we will have relationships — that's what we

will have in eternity, so it's important for us to get our relationships right.

That is what the word “righteousness” means — it means right conduct in our relationships. Righteousness has no meaning when it comes to the way we treat rocks. There is no “right” way to treat a rock. The concept of righteousness has meaning for relationships, especially relationships with other people, and that's something that will last into eternity.

So in order to be like God, to participate in a life like God has, then we need truth rather than falsehood — and notice the reason that Paul gives us: “because we are members of one body.” We are in this together — we are going to be living with each other for a really long time, so if we hurt somebody else, it is like shooting ourselves in the foot. We are hurting ourselves, in the long run.

Paul is saying that the main reason for right behavior is that we are all members of one body. We are one community, one people. God has made us so that we will be like he is in righteousness, in the way that we treat other people. God's purpose for us is righteousness, and that means good relationships.

Anger

Let's look at his next example, in verses 26 and 27: “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Anger, in itself, is not always wrong. The Bible describes *God* as being angry at some of the stuff some people do to hurt and abuse defenseless people. Parents are *right* to be angry when one child purposely hurts another. We love them and are angry at what they have done, all at the same time.

So in theory, anger isn't always wrong. But in practice, it usually is. Anger is very destructive to human relationships — that's why Paul says, Be careful with your anger. Don't stay angry, don't go to bed angry, because if you keep nursing a grudge against someone, you are acting like the devil, accusing people and

being an adversary. That sort of attitude kills relationships.

Another example is in verse 28: “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

It’s not enough to just quit stealing, or just stop doing bad stuff. No, we also need to start doing something good. We don’t just go from bad to neutral, from doing bad stuff to doing nothing at all. Rather, we replace bad behavior with doing something good. In this case, we try to earn enough money so that we can help someone who needs help.

Do you think that there was a big problem with thievery in the first-century church? I don’t think so. Everybody in the ancient world knew that they weren’t supposed to steal. So why did Paul tell people to stop stealing? I suspect that he includes this because it’s a really good illustration of replacing destructive behavior with constructive behavior. It shows a change of attitude from greed and selfishness, to generosity and helpfulness. It’s a change from the attitude of “get” to the attitude of “give.”

So far, Paul has mentioned:

- the words we use — truth rather than falsehood —
- and attitudes that we have — peace rather than anger —
- and actions that we do — giving rather than stealing.

Helpful words

In verse 29 he gives another illustration about words: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

What does he mean by “unwholesome” talk? I’m not sure, but it seems to be words that tear other people down instead of building them up. It’s gossip about how bad they are. It’s negativism that says, “You’re never going to amount to anything; you are too ugly; you are too sinful for God to ever like you.”

Those sort of comments damage relationships, and they are contrary to God's purpose for our lives.

So what do we do instead? We need talk that helps others according to their needs, that gives them some sort of benefit. It encourages them, helps them improve, lets them know that somebody cares about them and wants them to do well in life. It's words that tell people that the Creator of the Universe made them for a purpose, and he won't give up on them. It's words that strengthen bonds of friendship, words that express loyalty rather than betrayal, words that build community instead of tearing it apart.

Grieving God

The next verse in this chapter seems at first to be on a completely different topic. In verse 30 he writes, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

Everything else in this part of Paul's letter is about our relationships with one another. Why is he suddenly concerned about our relationship with the Holy Spirit? Why does he say, Don't disappoint the Holy Spirit? I think he does this for two reasons.

First, the Holy Spirit does care about how we treat one another, and the kind of words we use with one another. When our words are used to tear down instead of build up, the Holy Spirit is sad — sad at what we have done to the relationship, sad at how we have hurt someone in the same body, sad that we are reinforcing in ourselves a habit that isn't good for us.

Second, the Holy Spirit is the divine life that is working in us. He encourages us to do right, to be helpful, to be truthful. And when we refuse his advice, we are refusing him, and that grieves our relationship with him. He does care about what we do, but even more about what sort of persons we are.

Now, all of us fall short. We disappoint ourselves, and

sometimes work contrary to what God is trying to do in our lives. But there is no reason for us to despair, Paul says, because the Holy Spirit's relationship with us is not fragile. He is not looking for an excuse to break it off and abandon us to our own folly.

No, Paul says that the Holy Spirit seals us for the day of redemption — the time in the future when we will be resurrected and given transformed bodies far better than what we have now. He has sealed us, earmarked us for God's family. He wants us to be there, and he will never disown us.

He is fiercely loyal to us, and even though we are sometimes faithless toward him, he is always faithful toward us. We are sealed for salvation, and God won't give up on us. That's why he cares so much about what we do and how we live — because we'll be living with him, and with each other, for a long, long time.

Avoiding trouble

Paul has now given several specific examples. In verse 31 he gives a whole basketful at once: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

Why does the Bible give us rules like this? Is it because God just wants to give us a test that he knows we can't pass? Did he just make up these rules to make life difficult for us? No, not at all. He wants to make life *easier* for us, not difficult, and these are the sort of things that mess lives up. These are the sort of things that hurt people, and God says,

"Hey, wait a minute. I like those people just as much as I like you, and I don't want you hurting them with your words of anger, or your slander, and I don't want them to hurt *you* in that sort of way, either. Life in my kingdom doesn't have any room for that sort of back-stabbing, so that's not a very good habit to have. Get rid of it, and life will work a lot better for everyone concerned.

"Bitterness isn't good for your health, and it's not good for your relationships. Rage and anger are dangerous, and brawling is just plain stupid. And get rid of that bad attitude called malice.

Don't harbor bad thoughts about people and hope for bad things to happen to them. This is not what you were created for. This might be what you did in the past, but this is not the future you have been created for.”

Forgive each other

After this basket of rotten fruit, Paul gives us a basket of good fruit in verse 32, with a few good things to do *instead of* malice and rage: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Be compassionate. Care about other people. That's a basic rule of good relationships. That's a basic guideline for what it means to be like God in his righteousness. Don't view your relationships as a competition for who's best, for who's the most important, for who gets their way.

And in this imperfect world, things don't always go right. People don't always treat us right, even when they are trying to. Sometimes even the best of people are going to hurt our feelings, do something that disappoints us, embarrasses us or make life more difficult for us. And when that happens, the basic rule of good relationships is to forgive each other.

Just remember: You were created to be like God, and his Spirit lives in you, so let him do *in* you and *through* you the same thing that he does for you — he forgives us a lot, so we should be willing to forgive other people the things they do to us. God forgave the people who killed his Son. In Acts 7, Stephen forgave the people who were killing him. God is willing to forgive us no matter what we do to him, even when we were his enemies, and so we should be willing to forgive other people no matter what they do to us.

Is that difficult? You bet it is. But we really *do* need to forgive other people — for our own sake just as much as for theirs. As long as the desire for revenge eats at us, we will be captive to it. It is only when we let go of those hurts of the past, that we can be freed from a burden we were never supposed to carry.

Some of us carry great pain and an unwillingness to forgive someone who hurt us a great deal. If that's you, that attitude isn't helping you very much, is it? I suggest that you counsel with someone about it. That can help lift a burden off of you that is really too big to carry. Depending on the kind of pain you carry, it can take a long time to process it all. But the sooner you start, the sooner you'll complete the process.

So learn to forgive, Paul says. Learn to be like God in that respect, too. That is the sort of life that he is inviting you to enjoy for all eternity. Don't let something that happened to you years ago, keep you in its clutches. Don't let that evil person keep a ball and chain on your life today. Learn to let go, to forgive, to pray for your enemies instead of harboring malice toward them.

A good imitation

Paul summarizes his teaching in chapter 5, verse 1: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children." We were created to be like God, so in all these instructions, Paul is telling us to be like God is. Since we are his children, we need to act like he does. This is not something we do to earn a spot in eternity — no, Paul says that we are already *in* the family of God. We just need to learn what this family lives like, so we can do it, too.

The summary word for God's life is "love," so Paul says in verse 2: "and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Again, God set the example. He is not asking us to do anything he isn't willing to do himself. God is love, and that pretty much describes the relationship we are supposed to have with everyone around us, and it describes the relationships we will have in eternity.

But we can't just make up our own definition of love. Our culture talks about "making love," but what it seems like most of the time is that they are just setting somebody up for *betrayal*. They use the word "love" for selfish purposes, and that is exactly

the opposite of what it's supposed to mean.

In one of John's letters, he tells us what love is — he says, This is how we know what love is — Jesus Christ died for us. Love means being willing to accept a little inconvenience in order to help somebody else. It means thinking about how we can help somebody else, not how we can get what *we* want.

It means telling the truth, it means getting rid of anger, it means working in order to share with people who have needs, it means giving encouraging words instead of words that put other people down. It means saying sorry for what we've done wrong, it means forgiving when people do something wrong to us. It means being like God in righteousness and holiness. It means living like he does; it means letting him live in us.

Moving to a better life

Most of us moved to wherever we are because we thought we'd have a better life here. Now I'd like you to think about another move — a move to the kingdom of God. There is certainly a better life there, in both senses of the word *better*. There are better things for us, and we are better people — and the kingdom of God is a wonderful destination precisely because there are better people there, and *we* will be better, too. God has designed us for this very purpose, and he is not going to give up on the good things that he wants to give us. He is always faithful to his purpose.

But we do not have to wait for the future to be better people, to have a better life. The kingdom of God exists even now, in all of God's children, in all the people the Holy Spirit lives in.

And why is that?

It's because Jesus gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice. He has done whatever it takes for us to be in God's good graces. He has paid the price, or whatever other metaphor you want to use, so that we can be there. We are included as part of the family; now he just asks us to act like it, to let the Holy Spirit do his transforming work in our minds, to change our desires and

attitudes, to strengthen our relationships, to let love and loyalty be the story of our life rather than betrayal and bitterness.

But it does require some fundamental changes in the way people live. Paul says to put off the old rotten way of life. Most of us have already begun this process, to one degree or another. But no one has completed the process yet. We can always improve, we can always have a *better* life, because God offers us the best life possible — his very own life that he wants to share with us for all eternity. The perfect love that is characteristic of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is being offered to us.

How do we describe this life of divine love? One way to describe it is righteousness, truthfulness, helpfulness, and forgiveness. This is what Paul says that we, as God's dearly loved children, need to choose. This is the life that he offers, and he hopes that we accept it not just for the distant future, but for the good it will do in our life and our relationships right now.

Not even a hint of evil

But it requires a change — a change from the way life used to be, and a change away from the way life still is for many people. Paul says in chapter 5, verse 3: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”

We should avoid even the appearance of sexual immorality. Why? Not because Paul is prudish, but because God created sex for something more important than casual entertainment and trivial relationships. Sex was designed to strengthen the exclusive relationship we call marriage, the relationship that gives children the stability and security that gives them confidence — and when sex is used outside of the context of an exclusive relationship, then it weakens its role in marriage.

Well, a lot more could be said on that, but we don’t need to do it right now. Paul is not focusing on that here — it is just one illustration out of several things we need to keep well away from.

We also need to avoid impurity and greed, because these are contrary to the way God's people should be, for the simple reason that they are contrary to the way God is.

Verse 4: "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." So we need to keep our language clean, and our jokes clean. We don't need dirty jokes that tarnish something that God made good.

What we need, Paul says, is an attitude of gratitude. Instead of having our mind in the gutter, or in the sewer, we need to set our minds on things above, on the good things that God is preparing for us. Or maybe I should say that God is preparing us for the good things. Either way, it's good, and it's his gift to us, and we ought to be thankful for it, because it's far better than what we deserve.

When we remember our future, we can be really thankful about the present.

In verse 5 Paul tells us why we should keep our words clean: "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

Now, as Paul says in other letters, we used to be like that. We *used* to have behavior that was contrary to the kingdom of God, but we were forgiven, we were washed, we were set apart for God's use by his grace, and the Holy Spirit now lives in us to change us from that, into something better.

If you are greedy, Paul says, then you have an idol. If getting stuff is more important to you than following God, then you have an idol. If immorality is stronger in your life than the desire to follow God, then you have an idol. And if you really like impurity, then you have an idol. And don't think you can bring idolatry into the kingdom of God. It just doesn't fit.

If you really want those corrupt desires, then you won't even *like* eternity in the kingdom of God, because those things won't be there. If you are doing those things, then you are not

participating in God's life; you are not doing what he made you for.

That doesn't mean that you are doomed to fail. No — Paul is just saying that we end up getting what we want. If we want greed and impurity, then that's what we will get. We'll have an eternity in which everyone around us is greedy. And if we want to be *rescued* from greed and impurity, then we *will* be rescued in the kingdom of God. If we had those things in our life before, then we don't have to keep them. We can change for the better.

So I ask you: Do you want a better life? You can *move*, if you want to, deeper into the kingdom of God. Christ has already qualified you to be there, but he doesn't force you to go. It's not just a better life — it is the *best* life — the life of *God*, that he wants to share with you.

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Dr. J. Michael Feazell talks to leading Trinitarian theologians about the good news that God loves you, wants you, and includes you in Jesus Christ. Most programs are about 28 minutes long. Our guests have included:

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Douglas A. Campbell, Duke Divinity School

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Trevor Hart, University of St. Andrews

George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary

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Jeff McSwain, Reality Ministries

Paul Louis Metzger, Multnomah University

Paul Molnar, St. John's University

Cherith Fee Nordling, Antioch Leadership Network

Andrew Root, Luther Seminary

Alan Torrance, University of St. Andrews

Robert T. Walker, Edinburgh University

William P. Young, author of *The Shack*

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Grace Communion Seminary

Grace Communion Seminary serves the needs of pastors and others engaged in Christian service who want to grow deeper in relationship with our Triune God and to be able to more effectively serve in the Incarnational life of the church.

Grace is the essence of our lives. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ reveals God to us, grants us life in him, leads us in forgiving and being forgiven, and gives us salvation. Our Triune God and his grace and love revealed through Jesus Christ is the center of our theology.

Communion defines the relationship we have with God, Jesus, and one another (2 Corinthians 13:14). The communion of the Holy Spirit binds us with Jesus, enlivens God's love in our hearts, and unites us as followers of Jesus Christ. We live in inseparable unity in Christ in the perpetual effects of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost.

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