



THE GOSPEL

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The gospel is the centre of following Jesus. The word “gospel” literally means good news, and it is this good news of Jesus that saves us and helps us follow Him.

The gospel of Jesus is simple enough that children can understand it, but rich enough that we will never comprehend its full depth. In its simplest form it is the good news of God’s grace to us through Jesus Christ. The gospel affects both our personal lives and the entire universe, so it has an upper (universal) story, and a lower (personal) story. To begin to believe the gospel of Jesus we should start with an understanding of life and death, and peace and relationship.

The Beginning

God existed before time, in perfect relationship with Himself (Father, Son, & Spirit). He made everything to reflect His glory and to bring glory to Him. After He created the earth and heavens and everything in them He said it was good (Gen. 1). His greatest creation however, is humanity. He created us in His image and out of everything He made, only humankind was invited into relationship with Him in the same way He is in relationship with Himself (within the Trinity). Though God said that everything He created was good, he said that the first human was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God created everything by His word, but He breathed life into humanity. For Adam & Eve (the first humans) peace was found and experienced in perfect relationship with God. God created everything in 6 days, and on the seventh day He rested. Peace, rest, and dependency on Him were central to creation, our enjoyment of creation, and our relationship with Him.

Life (Peace & Relationship)

The first man and woman enjoyed perfect peace with creation, with each other, and with God. Adam and Eve began life in a place called the Garden of Eden, and there was no need for clothes to cover themselves because creation was perfect (no extreme heat or cold), and because in their relationships there was nothing to hide physically, emotionally, or spiritually from each other or from God. Peace, rest, and relationship did not mean lack of activity or a robotic existence. God gave them the role of stewarding and taking care of His creation. This role was not difficult or strenuous, but gave them purpose. As they did this they brought glory to God. In God's goodness and love He provided for all of their needs and gave them access to everything He created for His glory and their enjoyment. As part of their enjoyment He gave them choice with regards to what to do, what to eat, and how to live. Love is not love, and peace is not peace when it is forced. In giving humanity free will He placed within the garden only one thing they were commanded not to do. God commanded them to refrain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it would bring death (Gen 2:16). God gave them the choice to obey Him and His way or to disobey Him and live their own way.

Life comes from God. To choose life means to depend on God, live to glorify Him, and receive identity, purpose, and meaning from Him. God's plan was for humanity to experience life through dependence on Him as the source and author of life.

Death (Sin & Separation)

God gave the opportunity for Adam and Eve to choose life or to choose death, to choose to follow Him or themselves and be – in a very real sense - their own god. One of His chief angels named Lucifer (Satan, the devil) had already chosen this path and attempted to overthrow God. He was cast away from God along with the one third of all angels who chose to follow rebel too. Satan came to Adam and Eve and tempted them to do the same thing by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He lied to them with half truths and they questioned whether or not eating the fruit (disobeying God) would really lead to death. (Gen. 3) Satan told them that rather than death they would have their eyes opened (knowing good and evil) and become like God. This was the first temptation, the first sin, and it led to spiritual and physical separation and death.

Sin brought with it a curse (the effects of sin) which ultimately leads to death. Everything in their nature and future changed in that moment. This impacted not only their own individual lives but the universe as well. Though Adam and Eve did not comprehend the seriousness of their sin, their choice for independence was a choice of death. Creation experienced decay, killing, troubled weather, disease, and for the first time all living things would one day physically die. Anything evil, bad, or horrible that has ever happened in all of creation began at that moment. For humanity this meant that their bodies, as part of creation, experience sickness, disease, decay, physical and spiritual death. Their role as stewards (to multiply and care for the earth, birthing and work) would now be painful and difficult. The most serious of the consequences, however, is that though they did not die physically that day they did die spiritually. Adam and Eve were separated from perfect relationship with God (from life) and they knew it.

The first thing they did after eating the fruit was to hide from God and try to cover their nakedness from each other. Separated from God and estranged from each other because of their sin, they were ashamed and hid from God. Perfect peace in all creation and perfect relationship with God (and each other) was broken. Every human born after Adam and Eve is born into sin, having a sinful nature that would continue to pull them away from God instead of towards Him.

God, in His love and in His anger, cast people out of the garden of Eden as Satan had been cast out of heaven. He did this so that they might not eat from the tree of life and live in separation from Him forever. God wants humanity to experience abundant and eternal life in Him so He hates and wars against sin because in bringing death it robs Him of glory, takes away our enjoyment and the blessing of unhindered relationship with, and life in, Him. God could not be good and loving and overlook sin. Sin ruined everything, and so He is just and good in having anger towards sin and judging the sinful. Adam and Eve (Our physical and spiritual parents) deserved to be cast out, deserved separation, and deserved both the result and the punishment for sin, which is death. To put it in human terms, a good parent or judge can't overlook disobedience or crime – that would be unfair and unjust and make the parent unloving and the judge dishonest. Adam and Eve's choice was passed on to everyone who came after them so that we all have been born into a sinful nature and would sin too. God was not content to leave us in this guilty, shameful, and condemned state, however. He held his love for us and anger at sin in perfect union in His redemptive plan. From the moment humanity sinned God began a grand plan to restore humanity to relationship with Him and restore the earth. This would be a plan soaked in love and requiring sacrifice. God began to unfold salvation even as he created coverings for Adam and Eve out of animal skin – the covering of their shame through the blood of the innocent.

The Good News

Creation (upper story) and our individual lives (lower story) are forever intertwined. For God to deal with sin/evil/death in us, He must deal with it in all creation as well. The good news is that God's plan is still life, and the story of creation (all of history), and the story of your life, is about God bringing everything back to life. God brings what was dead, back to life, and restores peace and relationship. His whole plan to do this is through a promised saviour known through the Hebrew term Messiah. The narrative and the prophecies of the Old Testament all point towards the coming of a Messiah/Christ (anointed one) who would bring restoration. After a period of 400 silent years the Messiah finally came. Not with force or power, but as a newborn King named Jesus.

Old and New Covenant: Law vs. Grace

The reality is that everyone has a sinful nature, we begin life independent from God, and we act on this nature by committing sin ***“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.” Romans 3:23 (NLT).*** Life is a gift, but death is something we earn as the result of sin. The result (consequence) for sin is rightfully death ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 (NLT).*** Death is both a consequence *and* a punishment for sin. It is both the natural result of a sinful life as one experiences the “death” of our own sinful choices, and it is the punishment for those sinful choices

in that all people will die. All sinful and guilty people will live and die apart from God never experiencing abundant life in God here on earth or eternal life with God.

The only thing that can make sin “right” is death. No one sin is greater than another, though there are greater consequences in this life for some sins over others. All sin, great or small, is ultimately punishable by death. In the same way serving time in prison pays the debt owed to the law & society for committing a crime, only death can pay the debt owed for committing sin. ***“For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” Hebrews 9:22b (NLT)***. This is full justice at work. Only the shedding of blood through death can pay the penalty of sin and make things right for the one who committed the sin.

The whole of the Old Testament narrative shows this reality in vivid detail. In fact God takes the shedding of blood literally. He instituted a system of animal sacrifice to cover over sin so the people could receive forgiveness for their sins. Through the death of an animal (shedding of blood), a person can be made right with God again, and the sin is forgiven. He also gave people His laws (including the 10 commandments) to make His perfect standards clear so people would know what was and what was not sin. He began these systems by forming a nation through a man named Abraham and his wife Sarah, through whom all people could be blessed and be brought back to right relationship with God.

He sealed His plan with these people (Israel) by making a covenant (a sacred and binding agreement based in relationship) through the shedding of animal blood. This was a lasting and binding relationship, but only a temporary system to deal with sin that would foreshadow the fulfilment of His plan through the Messiah.

We discover several things as we follow the narrative of God’s people through of the “Old Testament”. This term means “old covenant” and was based on God’s promise of faithfulness to His people, and their promise to obey His laws and follow Him .

People continue to be sinful – Again and again individuals, and the whole nation of Israel (God’s chosen people) chose independence from God and disobeyed Him. No matter how many times God would allow them to experience the results of sin (a life of “death”), or how many times He would discipline them to bring them back to himself, people chose their own way of sin over His way. Both a marriage relationship between a man and a woman and God’s relationship to His people are covenant relationships. Unfaithfulness and independence from God through sin is pictured in the bible as being the same (having the same impact) as adultery. Yet God in His love continued to pursue the restoration and rescue of humanity.

God is love– God disciplined His people, and even “*poured out*” His wrath regarding sin and what it does to people and His creation. But no matter how many times people sinned, and no matter how justifiably angry God was, He always offered a way back to Him. God is slow to anger, but abounding in love. When Moses (a leader of God’s people) asked to know who God was, God described himself like this ***“The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.” Exodus 34:6b (NLT)*** In the New Testament we see this Old Testament truth stated plainly ***“7 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another,***

for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8 (NLT)

Law & Sacrifice were not enough – No one could follow God’s law and standards perfectly, even after being forgiven again and again. People’s effort, even for the most devout prophets and committed kings was not perfect enough. Sacrifice after sacrifice followed sin after sin. Year after year of this could not restore peace on earth and unhindered relationship with God. The promised land where God’s people lived was not a fully restored land with a fully restored people because the law, system of sacrifice, and God’s first covenant with His people were temporary and incomplete. These systems were given to show that we deserve punishment and can’t undo what we started (sin and death). Everything looked forward to God’s better way – the gift of life found only through the Messiah.

The term New Testament means “New Covenant,” and we find in the New Testament the fulfillment of the prophecy and narrative of the Old Testament. The new covenant would move beyond the insufficiency of the law and would be based on God’s grace through Jesus Christ. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus all things can be made new. **“Jesus told him, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*”** *John 14:6 (NLT)* The only way back to the Father, the only true identity and purpose for all humanity, and the only real life to be found is in Jesus alone.

This was God’s plan all along, but by the time Jesus began His ministry the religious system of being made right with God was fully based on human effort known as “law.” The religious leaders of that era continued to add to God’s law with laws of their own to help people keep God’s law and be holy. This was noble, but made an impossible situation even worse.

The good news of the grace of God through Jesus (the gospel) is that God has done everything necessary for us to be forgiven of our sin, restored to right relationship with Him, and raised to new life in Jesus. We *are all still* sinful from birth, and despite our best effort (even religious ones) we can’t undo death. We can’t restore peace, and we can’t be perfect enough to remove the sin-separation to be in relationship with God the Father again. Life is a gift and it can’t be earned. Death, the results (debt) of sin is earned by everyone. There is still a debt (punishment) of death to be paid for each person because of sin. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection we can find freedom from sin and freedom to new life. This is the gospel (good news) and the gospel affects both creation (upper story) and our individual lives (lower story).

The Old Testament (old covenant) and New Testament (new covenant) both have several themes and illustrations that help us understand, believe, receive, and live out the GOSPEL.

Exchange (Sacrifice, Atonement, Reconciliation, Satisfaction, & Redemption)

The law and system of sacrifice were only temporary. The law could only show us our sin, but was powerless to help us to obey God. Animal sacrifice could cover over sin, but could not fully deal with sin or conquer death. People are born with a sinful nature and we act on this nature by breaking God’s law (sinful behaviour) and need our sins “atoned” for. *“The meaning of the word (atonement) is simply at-one-ment, i.e., the state of being at one or being reconciled (to God)... it*

means satisfaction, and in this sense to make an atonement for one is to make satisfaction for his offences." (Easton's Bible Dictionary) In the Old Testament only a pure (sinless), spotless, perfect animal (lamb) could be sacrificed to atone for sin and satisfy the need for death as the payment for sin. A priest would symbolically place a person's sin on the animal, and the (sinless) animal would die in place of the person. That person, or in some cases the whole nation, would be "reconciled," or brought back into right relationship with God. This was done again and again because people sinned over and over.

Jesus, God's son, was born fully human and fully God. He was under the power of sin being born into a sinful world, but did not have a sinful nature and lived a perfectly sinless life. Because of these realities Jesus had no personal sin to satisfy or atone for and could be a better sacrificial lamb for all humanity (Rev. 5:9). Jesus stood in our place and received the punishment we deserved even though He was innocent. Jesus died on the cross once for all (Rom 6:10) to be a complete sacrifice for sin for everyone, with no need to die again. What Jesus did for us on the cross resonated throughout history – for everyone who ever lived and everyone who would ever live, For all the sins you've committed and all the sins you will commit. Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled the old system of law and sacrifice for those who lived under it, and for us who do not.

Through Jesus death we can be reconciled (brought back) to God and redeemed. Redemption means *"the purchase back of something that had been lost, by the payment of a ransom."* (Easton's Bible Dictionary) In the Roman world at the time of the New Testament this idea carried with it the illustration of slavery. That a slave would be purchased at the full price, but set free after the price was paid. The full requirements of the law and the system of sacrifice were met in the sinless and perfect person of Jesus, and God's righteous wrath towards sin was poured out on Him on our behalf.

Through no effort of our own God does everything necessary for sin to be atoned, and for us to be redeemed and reconciled. There is a great exchange from Jesus to those who choose to believe in and follow Him. Jesus receives our belief in exchange for His effort. Jesus takes on death for us and gives us His life. Jesus takes on our sin and guilt and places on us His innocence and righteousness. God takes our filthy sin and places it on His perfect son so that we might have Jesus' perfect and sinless righteousness placed on us – death exchanged for life, sin exchanged for righteousness. This is not metaphorical or positional, this is the gift of God to His loved and highest creation (humanity) to do in them what they could not do for themselves.

Innocence & Identity

When God created Adam and Eve they were born innocent (having never sinned) and their identity (nature) was in God and pulled them towards following God. When sin entered the world their nature became sinful and pulled them towards independence from God. In Christ Jesus, however, we can be justified (Rom 3:24-26). That is a term that means declared innocent. Though we are not innocent of sinful behaviour or free from being born with a sinful nature, when we believe in Jesus and decide to follow Him Jesus gives us His innocence and takes our guilt. In doing so He gives us a new spiritual nature and identity that pulls us towards following God again. We

are adopted as God's sons and daughters when we are declared innocent (Rom 8:15-17). We are given the "sonship" of Jesus, and are coheirs with Him to all of God's blessing and promises as His children.

Something else significant happens when someone becomes a follower of Jesus. Part of receiving a new spiritual nature is that the Holy Spirit (God's Spirit) comes to live in and through us. As good as it was for Jesus' disciples to have Him physically present to teach and lead them, we have God's Spirit in us at all times which is even better. Followers of Jesus live from a standing of innocence before God and from a new identity in Him. We can live in obedience to God through God's power in us (The Holy Spirit) and not greater effort to appease or impress a distant and unknowable God.

Transformation & Resurrection

In the same way that Adam's first sin brought death, so Jesus' life, death, and resurrection brings life (2 Cor. 5:17-18; Rom 5:15). In the same way Jesus died and rose again, so our old sinful self died with Him and a new one has been raised with Him. We are made completely new (regenerated). Although we been made completely new when we believe in and begin to follow Jesus we begin the process of learning to live this new life. This process of putting behind us old sinful patterns and learning to obey God in the power of the Holy Spirit and from our new identity is called sanctification. This is a lifelong process of learning to submit to the Spirit of God in our attitudes, thoughts, behaviour, and character. This is not a process of learning a new religious system to follow God on our own, but of leaning on the Spirit of God to live through us and help us to obey God.

This new life is not the result of our being good enough but is the result of a complete transformation. Jesus' followers are raised to new life in Jesus (Gal 2:20-21, 2 Cor. 5:17). The first sin (Adam's sin) brought death to all people, and the first new life (Jesus' resurrection) brought the possibility of new life for all people. Though Jesus lived under the power of sin as we do, He never sinned. So when Jesus died on the cross He broke the power of sin and conquered death when He rose again to new life. This means that followers of Jesus do not need to be controlled by sin anymore. Though they will still physically die, because the world is still under the effects of sin, they are forever spiritually alive (Rom 6:5-11).

To deal with sin and death fully, however, God will apply the same work of Jesus Christ to all people and creation. All people will be judged, and the full debt of death for sin will be paid. In the lower story (lives of individuals) this means that people who have not been restored to life and perfect relationship with God through the gift of grace in Jesus will pay the debt of death for their sin themselves. These people, against God's best plan for them, will spend eternity separated from God in the fullness of "death" in a place called hell. In the upper story (creation) the angels who rebelled against God, including Satan, will be cast into hell as well. God's creation, being affected by sin, will be done away with, and raised to new life, and God's children will spend eternity with Him in the fullness of "life." God is the source of life in this New Heaven and New Earth. In this process God will restore the peace in His creation that was present before sin and death entered in – in fact He will make it better. Whatever/whoever a person is connected to in

physical life they will continue to be connected to in death. Those who have lived in sin and death and independence (separation) from God will continue to be separated from God, and those who have chosen new life will continue in the blessing and fullness of life with God. (John 3:16; Rev. 20:15-16)

By Grace through Faith

The amazing thing to consider is that God did this through Jesus not because we deserved it, and not because we have begun to be good, but because He loved us. While we were dead in our sin (Rom 5:8). The bible calls this process of moving from spiritual death to spiritual life being “born again?” (John 3)

It is by God’s grace, and through our faith (belief) that we can be transformed and be raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. This is not through our effort (law & religion), but through what God has done for us through Christ Jesus to restore our relationship with Him. The new life we live in Christ is in His power and through His leading. He has good things for us to do on His behalf, not for our salvation, but for His glory, our good, and the salvation of others.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:8-10 (NLT)

Grace can be defined as both God’s favour towards us when we don’t deserve it, and His ongoing power in us to be in relationship with Him. Grace isn’t just God’s full system for treating the problem of sin, it is the ongoing power of God to fully deal with it in our lives and His enabling for us to obey Him. One way we can describe God’s grace is...

God's love for us and power in us to save us and empower us to live for Him

Belief in Jesus and a decision to follow Him are what is required of any person to go from spiritual death to life. Faith is the term the bible uses to describe having a sure belief in the reality of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Repentance is a term used to mean turning from your old sinful way to God’s way. Faith is always accompanied by repentance (Mark 1:15). Repentance involves agreeing with God in your heart, mind, and practice that your way (sin) is wrong and that you choose to live differently through God’s power. Faith and repentance can be understood like this...

*“Imagine standing on a beach with your back to the sea. In turning around, you only turn once, but there are two ways to describe it. You could say that you turned toward the ocean, or you could say that you turned away from the beach. In the same way, faith and repentance are akin to two ways of describing the same turn. Repentance is turning away from sin, while faith is turning toward God.” **Matt Chandler***

You can’t believe without repenting – you can’t say you believe and then not act on it. That would mean you don’t actually have faith. Believing and repenting are something followers of Jesus do again and again, believing that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection have raised you to new life and

that you choose to run back to God as often as you sin. This is the active and eternal grace of God in your life. Ongoing faith and repentance is part of sanctification, not that a person is saved again and again, but that a saved person can't be made sinful again. What God has raised to life can't die again.

Though followers of Jesus will still sin, they are in the process of learning new patterns of behaviour in the power and through the presence of Jesus. The New Testament calls this putting on the new and putting to death the old. It is a process marked by times of victory and failure. Lacking repentance or making excuses/allowance for sin are signs that a person does not understand grace and has likely not been made new (Rom. 6). Agreeing with God (confession) that you have sinned and drawing near in repentance to Jesus rather than living independent of Him is part of the process of spiritual maturity. In the process of sanctification God will continue to reveal areas that are not fully His and that require repentance. The Holy Spirit's power, prayer, and support of other believers are needed to put to sinful patterns to death and learn to walk in freedom.

Our denomination, the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada, summarizes salvation like this...

We believe that in spite of our rebellion, God still loves all of humanity and has mercifully extended His life-giving grace toward us. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, people who believe in Him are forgiven of sin and declared righteous (justification), are made spiritually alive (regeneration), and are set apart into a never-ending relationship with Him as holy people who are being renewed in the image of God (sanctification).

True belief will be evidenced by heartfelt repentance from and godly sorrow for sin, complete trust (faith) in Jesus Christ as Saviour, and surrender to His will as Lord. Spiritual life will result in spiritual fruit in a life increasingly marked by love for God, fellow believers and the lost.

Salvation is God's gracious gift, to be accepted through faith, through which the believer can be assured of personal salvation which speaks to the past in the forgiveness of sins, to the present of a continuing walk with Christ, and to the future with the promise of resurrection life. Our assurance is in our continuing relationship with Christ by faith. As a result of the saving grace of Christ, the believer can experience a Spirit-filled, Spirit-gifted, and Spirit-led life of victory over sin. In submission to the Spirit the believer's life will show increasing alignment with the Great Commandment and Great Commission of Jesus.

Humanity was given choice in the beginning of time to follow God, and we're given choice still. You can choose forgiveness and freedom through Jesus and experience spiritual life and restored relationship with God both in this life and after you die. Or you can continue to independence (separation) from God and experience spiritual death in this life and after physical death when God judges all things. Jesus is good news to those who believe in and follow Him. It is our hope that you will choose Jesus Christ, experience freedom from sin, and freedom to new life in Him.

Scripture References

Proverbs 14:12 (NLT) 12 There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.

Isaiah 26:3 (NLT) 3 You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Luke 10:18 (NLT) 18 “Yes,” he told them, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning!

Isaiah 14:12 (NLT) 12 “How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world.

James 1:14–15 (NLT) ¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. ¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

Revelation 5:9 (NLT) 9 And they sang a new song with these words: “You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Romans 6:10 (NLT) 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God.

Romans 3:24–26 (ESV) 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 5:8 (NLT) 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Romans 8:15–17 (NLT) 15 So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children.* Now we call him, “Abba, Father.”* 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

John 5:24 (NLT) 24 “I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

2 Peter 1:3–4 (NLT) 3 By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. 4 And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.

John 5:24 (NLT) 24 “I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

Ephesians 2:1–10 (NLT) 1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.* He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. 7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

2 Corinthians 5:17–18 (NLT) 17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

Romans 5:15 (NLT) 15 But there is a great difference between Adam’s sin and God’s gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:20–21 (NLT) 20 My old self has been crucified with Christ.* It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.

Mark 1:15 (NLT) 15 “The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”

Romans 6:5–11 (NLT) 5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. 6 We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Revelation 20:14–15 (NLT) 14 Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. 15 And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

John 3:15–17 (NLT) 15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. 16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave* his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Matthew 10:22 (NLT) And all nations will hate you because you are my followers. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 22:37–40 (NLT) 37 Jesus replied, “ ‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Matthew 28:18–20 (NLT) 18 Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

John 3:16–21 (NLT) 16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. 18 “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. 19 And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

John 15:4 (NLT) Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

Acts 2:22–42 (NLT) 22 “People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. 23 But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. 24 But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. 25 King David said this about him: ‘I see that the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. 26 No wonder my heart is glad, and my tongue shouts his praises! My body rests in hope. 27 For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. 28 You have shown me the way of life, and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.’ 29 “Dear

brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. 30 But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on his throne. 31 David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave. 32 "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. 33 Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. 34 For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said, 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand 35 until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.'" ' 36 "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" 37 Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God." 40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" 41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all. 42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

Romans 5:1–2 (NLT) 1 Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

Romans 6:11 (NLT) So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:19–23 (NLT) 19 Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. 21 And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. 22 But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:14–6:2 (NLT) 14 Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. 15 He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. 16 So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we

know him now! 17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. 1 As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it. 2 For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you." Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NLT) 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Genesis 6:5 (NLT) The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.

John 3:3-7 (NLT) 3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." 4 "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" 5 Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7 So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'

Romans 3:10 (NLT) As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous— not even one.

Romans 3:18 (NLT) "They have no fear of God at all."

Romans 3:23 (NLT) For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Ephesians 2:1-3 (NLT) 1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

Titus 2:11-14 (NLT) 11 For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. 12 And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, 13 while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. 14 He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.