

THE GOSPEL OF NEW LIFE

A Public Faith Curriculum
by Phyllis Crosby

Purpose: To understand the hope of the gospel as new life and how to begin living that life.

Overview:

Introduction

Chapter 1 The Vitality of New Life

- *The Spirit Filled Life*

Chapter 2 The Orientation of New Life

- *Understanding the Created Order*
- *Embracing the Way of the Cross*

Chapter 3 The Realm of New Life

- *Living In the World not Of the World*

Chapter 4 The Scope of New Life

- *Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines*

Recommended Reading:

Five Smooth Stones, Tom Nelson

The Divine Conspiracy, Dallas Willard

Introduction

The life of a newly adopted child changes drastically and almost instantly as they are transferred from the status of orphan to the status of family member. The change affects not only the child's current situation but also the entire trajectory of his or her life.

Adopted children are removed from what they might have been and brought into something completely new and different. Not only do these kids gain a whole new family orientation but in the case of international adoptions, in a few moments their citizenship is transferred from one country to another, completely changing their cultural orientation as well.

This gives a glimpse into the relationship that we have been brought into through adoption. On the cross Jesus makes it legally possible for us to enter God's family. Our citizenship is transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's son, and we receive a new cultural orientation as we take on kingdom values. God relates to us in many ways when we put our faith in Jesus, but none is so intimate and personal as when he calls us his children and we call him, "Abba Father."

When you became a Christian you did far more than assume a new religion. You responded to the God of the entire universe, who, standing at the door of unseen reality invited you to become part of his family, his world, his heart. He invites you to join him in his work and his play and even to take part in his kingdom reign. He continually calls to you to become all that you were designed and created to be. He beckons you to fall as deeply in love with him as he is in love with you.

The foundation of Jesus' invitation is his offer of a new life, and a new kind of living. If you understand the offer correctly you realize that nothing in your life will ever be quite the same again. As God reorients your life to his life, he alters and adjusts your purpose, values, power source, view of yourself and the world, and much more.

In *The Call*, Os Guinness writes, "...God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service."¹

Our faith changes the very nature of the life we live. Merely a theological understanding of this new life is not enough. We need to know what it is and how to live it. In this article we will look at the nature of our new life in Christ and how we can live this new life in the world around us.

Think back to when you first placed your trust in Jesus. What was it that you hoped for? Chances are you expected something immediately tangible, something that would change your life now. For many people the gospel of Jesus seems to end in the hope of heaven, when hope for a better kind of life here on Earth never materializes. Bitterly disappointed in the Christian life, some look else where for answers to their deepest questions.

What is this new life we are promised? And how can we live it? To discover the meaning of life, let's look at the definitions of the words *life* and *live*.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary the idea of life or living has four components: vitality, orientation, realm and scope.

1. Life is the source of vitality or animating force. Life has *vitality* or power source.
2. To live or conduct one's existence according to a particular manner. Our lives have an *orientation*.
3. To live or to reside in a specific place. Our lives take place in a *realm*.
4. Life is the interval of time between birth or conception and death. Life has *scope*.

Much of our life with Christ remains a mystery. He continually draws us to himself and never let's us go when we want to quit. Our long and often painful journey to the heart of Jesus cannot be put into a simple formula. Who can say why one person walks through trying circumstances only to know deep joy while another seemingly does the same but arrives at bitterness? One seems more fully alive while the other is unsatisfied and leaves the faith. One walks in new life while the other merely survives.

Let's look at the four dimensions of our existence, the *vitality* (or *life force*), the *orientation*, the *realm* and the *scope*, to better understand the new life that we have been given.

Introduction Summary Points:

- When you became a Christian you did far more than assume a new religion.
- The foundation of Jesus' invitation is his offer of new life, and a new kind of living.
- As God reorients your life to his life, he alters and adjusts your purpose, values, power source, your view of yourself and the world and much more.

Chapter 1 - The Vitality of our New Life in Christ

The dictionary defines *life* as, "an animating force or source of vitality." Life force is what is missing from the patient on life support. The patient is not fully alive; there is no vitality or animation. Before Jesus infuses us with new life we are a lot like a person on life support, but when Christ gives us new life to replace that which is spiritually dead, we are truly alive. Jesus himself becomes our animating force, our vitality. He becomes our life and our lives then become empowered and organized around his eternal being. Our new life has a new vitality, Jesus' life.

A.W. Tozer's definition of the gospel message gives us insight into what kind of life we have received, "Here is the whole final message of the New Testament: Through the atonement in Jesus' blood sinful men may now become one with God. Deity indwelling man!"² Deity indwelling man, or

God living inside people! Our new life is Jesus himself living in us. The kingdom of God is truly in our midst, because when Christ *abides in us* he is *always very present*.

In the book of Colossians, Paul speaks of the fact that Christ indwells us as the very essence of the gospel. Colossians 1: 25-28, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known *what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" In Colossians 3: 15,16 Paul continues in this vein, referring to the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts and his word dwelling in us.

Without Jesus we have no life. *And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.* 1 John 5:11-14

Jesus' life in us is composed of action—animation. Eternal living is not separate from our bodies, minds, emotions and wills. It is Jesus engaging in these aspects of our very real, very current personal being. Our spiritual life is expressed in and through our physical lives. They cannot be separated. This means that eternal living is for the physical realm not just the spiritual realm. Our physical bodies get vitality from the food and water that we consume. But Jesus makes it clear that we cannot live on bread alone; we must also feed on Jesus for life in this physical world. (John 6:27-28; John 4:13-15; Matthew 4:4; John 6:54-59)

Consider Romans 8:9-11, the Spirit gives life to your_mortal bodies: *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

The power or vitality of our new life is the eternal Jesus living in us, in our physical bodies, and so this new life is to be lived through our physical bodies in the physical world. Jesus is both the goal of our new life and the means to reaching the goal. He is our life and the means of living our life. Galatians 2:20 says, *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Our new life is very Christ-centric, it is *in and through and for him*. It is by Christ and because of Christ.

Our new life is to some degree a mystery, but God has given us enough information that we can enter into eternal living today, through the life of Jesus. How then do we live this life? It is by being *filled with the Holy Spirit*, our life force, through *faith and surrender* to Jesus.

Faith is not a passive sentiment in the Christian life. Faith *acts*. When we conclude that God is good, we *act* accordingly. When we understand his love, grace, judgment or desire for beauty we are compelled to *act* accordingly. This is faith, when we *act* on what we believe to be true. When we put our faith in Jesus we *act* according to what we know to be true. We live according to the values and principles he reveals through his Word.^a

We must understand that we live our new life in the context of a fallen world and without being fully liberated from our fallen self. Our fallen nature still exists and sin disrupts our life and faith in Christ. It stands in the way of our experiencing God as we were meant to. When sin reigns in our bodies and minds, Christ can't. As a result we see the affects of our sin, and in grief, we often deeply desire to change. This kind of self-evaluation can be very positive. Through it God can speak to us. He can enter the process and begin to change and transform us.

Transformational Living. Acting in faith leads into a rhythm of transformational living. This rhythm involves being transformed and allowing Jesus to use us in his transforming work in the lives of others and in society. However, because of the pain of sin and our own impatience we have a great ability to distort this process. We somehow reason that it's better to arrive at a state of perfection than to continue in the process of transformation. We forget that we don't minister when we arrive but as we travel.

Attributes or Substitutes – A volatile and frustrating swing. Recently when considering my life I was very much discouraged by the defeat and failure I was experiencing. It seemed that I was forever swinging from pursuing God to giving up and then back to pursuing him again. The problem was that I wasn't finding him very satisfying when I would pursue him and so I would give up and turn to satisfying substitutes.

I was no longer involved in transformational living. I wasn't pursuing God for God or for God's sake. I was pursuing him for his attributes. I wanted his peace, his justice or his strength more than I wanted him or the new life that Jesus came to give me.

When God didn't give me his attributes on demand, I quickly found satisfying substitutes. If he wouldn't satisfy me with his justice (and I'm glad he doesn't) I'd try to get what I wanted through my imaginations. Why wait for his peace when I could turn to food for instant comfort? Of course it wasn't long before I realized that these substitutes were wrong. I would try to repent but my repentance wasn't taking me to the right place. It was taking me back to *my* god, but not to the real God. It was taking me to a god that was my personal genie; one who I assumed was obligated to make life easy for me. It is easy to see why I would swing back and forth

^a According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Biblical faith is always grounded in God and involves *conviction, surrender* and *conduct*. See Romans 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 5:7.

between attributes and substitutes. One felt right but wasn't, the other was blatantly wrong.

What a comfort it was when I realized that I could be satisfied in pursuing God for God, not for what he could do for me. But this required a deep surrender, one that was very painful. I had to give up telling God how to apply his promises to my life. I had to give up telling God how to run my life.

If we are honest we have to admit that we came to Christ because we believed he could and would make a difference in our life. How does he change us, and how do we pursue this end without making change and growth an idol? How do we enter this rhythm of transformation?

One of the most perplexing ideas in Scripture is that the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Self-control implies that I am the one in control. And yet somehow it is the Spirit of God who is giving me this control. So who is in control, him or me? Understanding this scriptural concept is fundamental to understanding how we enter the process of transformation.

If self-control comes from God, then should we wait for him to do something, to change us in some drastic way? Is it reasonable to expect God to change our desires so that it is always preferable to do the right thing, resulting in perfect discipline? Sadly, he doesn't seem to work that way. On the other hand, should we set out on some new path of self-discipline to change ourselves expecting no help from the Lord? We always come back to the same question, who's in control? What is our part and what is his part of transformation?

A freeing insight: Because the fruit of the Spirit is self-control NO AMOUNT OF WILLPOWER WILL EVER CHANGE US! Our willpower cannot change us. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Think about a person who is undisciplined. What do they need? Self-control. Discipline. What they need is willpower to overcome their lack of willpower. This is an impossible conundrum if the needed willpower or self-control must come from within the very person who is in need of willpower! This is why willpower cannot change us, only the Spirit of God can. And yet when we passively wait for God to make us good and right nothing ever seems to happen. So we embark on change not by rallying our willpower or by abdicating our responsibility to change but by surrendering to the Spirit of God. This allows him to do his part while requiring us to do our part.

The same is true for all aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-24, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* How can a sad person simply decide to be joyful or an impatient person suddenly become patient? These come not by determining to become joyful or patient but by *surrendering* ourselves to Jesus Christ.

Surrender is different than giving-up and expecting God to make change easy. Surrender is active, not passive. It is a moment-by-moment,

cognizant submission of one's desires, thoughts and therefore actions to the person of Jesus Christ. It is in moments of surrender that we say, *not my will but yours, be done, right now, right here*. Once we surrender, the Spirit is free to have his way; in dying to our desires we live to Christ. Our struggle to surrender can be compared to Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane; as a matter of fact we are never closer to the human side of our Lord as when we are in our own garden.

Consider how hard it is to forgive someone who has wronged us. In hurt and anger we have a strong desire for justification and restitution. We may even want revenge. If the wrong done is very grave, these desires might seem justified. It is no wonder that no amount of willpower makes it possible to forgive. As hard as we try, our forgiveness never seems to stick. But when we surrender our rights to be understood, to be apologized to and to be paid back for the wrong done, Jesus deals with the hurt and anger making room for true forgiveness. This isn't magic; pain doesn't always go away instantly, but by faith we say, I give up my right to hold this sin against my brother.

One of the most significant forms of surrender is the confession of sin. So often as Christians we seem to be unsure of what to do with our sin. In faith there is only one possible solution for our sin: the process of confession, repentance and restitution. All of these are forms of surrender.

Surrender involves both the confession of sin (not my will) and the acquiescence to Christ (but Yours). We avoid sin by immediate acquiescence or obedience to Christ. In either case, surrender involves taking on a posture of real submission to Jesus. It allows him to have sway in our hearts and over our words and actions especially when we would rather do things our way. By faith we surrender to Jesus and in so doing the fruit of the Spirit, including self-control begins to grow and produce fruit in our character. But it is fruit that is deeply rooted in the Holy Spirit. It is this constant ebb and flow of confession and surrender that allows us to walk uninterrupted in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 1 - *The Vitality of New Life*

Summary Points:

- Jesus' life is the vitality of our new life, and so our new life is very Christ centric.
- We live our new life by being filled with the Holy Spirit through *faith* and *surrender* to Jesus.
- Faith is not a passive sentiment in the Christian life. Faith *acts*.
- Surrender is an active, moment-by-moment, very cognizant submission of ones desires, thoughts and therefore actions to the person of Jesus Christ.
- We are changed not by will power but by surrendering to the Spirit of God.
- It is a constant ebb and flow of confession and surrender that allows us to walk uninterrupted in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 - The Orientation of Our New Life In Christ

I read the gospels for the first time in my early twenties, as a very new believer. What initially struck me about Jesus was that everything he said seemed to be inside-out and backwards. He talks about the first being last and needing to die to live. He says I'm supposed to turn the other cheek and love my enemies. There is a certain counter-intuitiveness about him, and my initial disorientation was very real.

According to the dictionary *to live* can also mean, "to conduct one's existence (or life) according to a particular manner." For instance one might be described as having lived in the manner of a monk or according to the code of Confucian ethics. What is described here is life orientation.

Whatever code or manner we live by is what gives our life its orientation. Our new life reorganizes and reorients us because now, instead of living according to the principles of the world system, we live according to the principles of the kingdom of God. We take on a new way of thinking and a new way of doing things. We become kingdom citizens and assimilate kingdom culture. If we fail to live our life according to the 'particular manner' of the kingdom we are not living the eternal kind of life. We may get to heaven and eventually experience this promised kind of life there, but we miss all the promises for eternal living here, today.

In 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul exhorts Timothy to actively pursue a life that has been re-organized and reoriented according to kingdom principles, "*But flee from these things [immorality], you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.*" In verse 12 Paul explains how to do this, "*Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...*"

When our life begins to be reorganized and reoriented according to kingdom principles our values shift. Our view of ethics and morality become fixed in patterns for living that God established in Creation and our conscience is restored through the life we now possess. This "fixing in God's ways" leaves no room for sloppy morality.

Eternal living requires us to live according to God's kingdom principles in the midst of another worldly kingdom. In the work-place you will face many situations where your new orientation will be challenged. In order to maintain a clear conscience while facing these challenges you will require wisdom, grace and strength. Part of fighting the good fight is, "holding on to faith and a good conscience" 1 Timothy 1:18. In order to do this we must understand both what it is that Jesus expects of us and what it is that those around us in the earthly kingdom expect.

Re-orientation is not a once and for all process but something that is on-going. As we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God, he

And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

1 John 5:20

continually reorients us as he reshapes us and changes us into the likeness of his son. As a result it would be impossible to address kingdom orientation in its entirety. This article will address two kingdom principles that will help give our lives the proper orientation, that once understood will help us live life skillfully: *Understanding How God Works in the World* and *Embracing the Way of the Cross*.

Understanding How God Works in the World

Recently I was working with a friend on a ministry project. Things weren't going as well as we had hoped and she was beginning to get discouraged. When our plans seemed to be frustrated at every turn she asked me a question I have often asked myself, "Why doesn't God wave his magic wand and help make this happen?"

These questions flow out of a misunderstanding of the world we live in. We don't always understand how God created the world to work, the meaningful flow of history or our part of the story. Somehow in becoming a Christian we think that we are leaving behind the physical universe for something higher, better, more spiritual.

Here's the re-orientation: *God created this physical universe for us and he isn't keen to take us out of it.* We live in a physical universe, one in which we have been given real dominion. This is an incredible privilege and awesome responsibility. Disregarding the great privilege given me I sometimes demonstrate an attitude in prayer that is not faith but laziness; I want God to do-it for me. Instead of taking away the privilege and responsibility he has given me in exercising my dominion, he chooses to do it (whatever it may be) *through* me, instead of *for* me. Our dominion, that which makes us image bearers of God, is submitted to God and for God but is administered by us.

This wrong orientation about the created order often produces a deadly dichotomy. You may have heard it said that God is more interested in our "being" than our "doing." The idea in this teaching is that somehow we can be spiritual apart from our actions. This false dichotomy leads to either a life of contemplation or a life of action but rarely to one of contemplative action. How can we "be" apart from "doing?" It seems silly to even contemplate. Doing and being cannot be separated.

Consider the essence of our new lives. What does the new life consist of? At its essence our new life is Jesus acting redemptively. We are being restored and what we do is restorative. Our actions, or our "doing" flows out of who we are, or our "being." An integral life is one with no dichotomies. What we do is consistent with what we say, which is consistent with what we believe. The spiritual man or woman acts or lives (doing) according to a new orientation, that of the kingdom. The orientation of an integral life does not make room for hypocrisy. We cannot be spiritual (what we associate with "being") without being holy as Christ himself is holy (what we associate with "doing.")

In Matthew 15:16-20 Jesus re-orientes his listeners about this very thing: "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the

mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

We misunderstand the created order when we think that God is only interested in the spiritual aspects of our lives. When we fail to give a proper place to the physical universe we will find it difficult to understand how God intends to work in and through us on behalf of the world. It then becomes easy to retreat to an idea that somehow we can exist apart from the physical world and we set up the false dichotomy of doing and being.

Embracing the Way of the Cross

When I was a young Christian I was moved by the thought that Jesus died on the cross so that I wouldn't have to. As I have grown in my faith and come to know him better I realize that he died on the cross precisely so that I could join him there and die too. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous quote rings true, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."³ The road to the kingdom is by way of the cross.

Here's the reorientation: Pain and suffering can be either *destructive* or *redemptive* and *transformational*, but it can't be avoided.

Jesus' life culminated in his death, resurrection and ascension. He moved from the Garden of Gethsemane - to the cross. He was then buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. When we embrace the way of the cross we take on the attitudes and subsequent actions that he did in each of the various stages of his suffering resulting in a cycle of transformation. This often repeated cycle in our lives parallels the path that Jesus took which resulted in our redemption making the way of the cross, transformational.

In **The Garden** - Jesus experienced *Surrender*
On **The Cross** - Jesus experienced *Shame and Suffering*
In **The Grave** - Jesus experienced *Death*
Through **The Resurrection** - Jesus was *Transformed*
After **The Ascension** - Jesus became *Transformational*

The way of the cross is a very real cycle that Jesus calls us to. Our cross is different than his cross in many ways, particularly in that it does not remove our sin, but it is also very similar.

Jesus himself has shown us how to suffer. 1 Peter 2:21-25, *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

Let's consider his cross to better understand the cross we are to carry:

Jesus' cross was undeserved. It was not because of his own sin that Jesus suffered. A true cross is one that is undeserved. When we suffer because of our own sin we are suffering because of discipline. God may use such pain to bring us to repentance but this is not the cross we are called to bear. 1 Peter 2:19-20, *"For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God."*

Jesus' cross was for the sake of others. Just as Jesus did not die for himself we don't enter this cycle purely for ourselves. We certainly benefit from the transforming process but our calling is often for the sake of others, even those who have wronged us. Death for the believer looks like forgiveness. It looks like denying ourselves that to which we feel we are entitled. It is choosing not to revile and utter threats when reviled.

Jesus' cross was voluntary. Choice is a big part of transformation. Suffering because of unpreventable circumstances is not in itself a cross. Everybody suffers. Our cross, like Jesus', involves choice. Our choice may be limited to how we suffer rather than what we suffer, but even so when we choose to imitate Jesus in our suffering we are suffering voluntarily.

Jesus' cross was redemptive. There was purpose to Jesus' suffering and death. So much so that Luke 9:51 says, *"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."* Jesus' suffering will one day eliminate all suffering. By his death we live. We can only see in part the incredible victory won on the cross and claimed in the resurrection, but one day we will experience it in full. The cross that we are called to is also one of redemption. We will suffer so that others may experience Jesus better.

Why is the cross appealing? Hebrews 12:1-5, *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin..."*

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. Honestly, in times when I have truly chosen to take up the cross and die to myself, I have never been able to discern any perceivable joy, at least not from the outset. But as I have given way to the will of the Lord he changes me, and in this I rejoice. When we are like him in his death we become like him in his life. Romans 6:5 says, *If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.* When we know whom it is who calls us, when we look into his eyes we become willing to suffer as

he has suffered. We may squirm and fight but we can't deny the one who loves us.

The Transformational Cycle:

Surrender. *The Vitality of Our New life* addresses the topic of surrender. This is the beginning point in the way of the cross. It always begins with a choice.

Shame and Suffering. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that, "Forgiveness is a form of suffering." The following story demonstrates this truth:

I remember a time in prayer when I was praying for a friend who had deeply wronged me. I was praying that God would touch this person redemptively, bringing new life where she had a strong tendency to be destructive. My prayer ended with its typical, "If you aren't going to change her, please take away her influence."

Basically this person was continuing to give me grief, and as much as I wanted God to act redemptively on her behalf, I wanted more to be free from the effects of her behavior. It seemed reasonable to me, but it was at this point in my prayer when I had a strong sense of Jesus calling my name. I looked up, as if into the eyes of my Lord as he hung on the cross. "Come and join me on behalf of your friend. Don't put conditions on my redemption. This is real forgiveness." I recoiled in horror. "No," I said, "I don't want to die." Choosing to forgive was truly suffering for me., but as I yielded to the Lord real forgiveness became possible, and I was flooded with the life I longed for.

Forgiveness is not the only form of suffering that we encounter in the way of the cross, but it is the form that most reflects Jesus' suffering at the hands of sinners.

Romans 8:15-17, *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.*

Death. The process of surrender and suffering brings us to a point of death. Regardless of the cause of our suffering, death comes when we loosen our grasp on those things, other than Jesus, in which we have trusted. It is a process of prying out of our hearts those things that have become ultimate sources of life and significance. With death comes peace and rest.

Romans 6:2-4, *We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Transformed. This process allows Jesus to live his life more fully through us. We are changed.

Romans 6:5-10, If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Transformational. Once transformed, we become transformational. We become transformational in how we relate to the one who has wronged us, we are able to truly love and forgive. And we become transformational in how we relate to others in their time of suffering.

Ephesians 2:6-7, And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:11, And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

The Cycle of Transformation

Hebrews 2:10-12

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Philippians 3:7-15

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies

behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.



Chapter 2 - The Orientation of New Life

Summary Points:

- Our new life reorganizes and reorients us because now instead of living according to the principals of the world system, we live according to the principals of the kingdom of God.
- **Reorientation:** God created this physical universe for us and he isn't keen to take us out.
- **Reorientation:** Pain and suffering can either be destructive or redemptive and transformational but it can't be avoided.
- The way of the cross is a very real cycle that Jesus calls us to.

Chapter 3 - The Realm of Our New Life In Christ

A synonym for *living* is to *reside* or to live in a place for an extended or permanent period of time. This aspect of residing speaks of our realm. With new life comes a new realm, the kingdom of Christ, God's beloved son. *For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* Colossians 1: 13-14

Dallas Willard explains kingdom living like this, "The kingdom is present in action and available with and through the person of Jesus. That is Jesus' gospel...this kingdom is not something to be "accepted" now and enjoyed later, but something to be entered now (Matthew. 5:20; 18:3; John 3:3,5). It is something that already has flesh-and-blood citizens (John 18:36; Philippians 3:20) who have been transformed into it (Colossians 1:13) and are fellow workers in it (Colossians 4:11)."⁴

The natural question at this point is how does the kingdom of God interface with the world we live in? Jesus speaks of the kingdom's interface as being "in" but "not of" this world.

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." Luke 17:20-21

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." John 18:36-37

The realm of our new life is the present and available kingdom of God, which is *in the world* today *but not of the world*. And just as the kingdom of God is in this world but not of this world we too are to live in but not of the world. The “in” but “not of” interface of the kingdom is what allows it to be both eternal and yet very much present today.

There is an incredibly important principle for Christian living in the concept of “in” but “not of”. It is so important and yet it is often overlooked, rendering believers powerless to influence the world around them, either because they over-identify with the world system or because they remain separated and therefore outside of the world system. In the book of John, chapter 17 we discover more about this principle. On the way to Gethsemane Jesus stopped and prayed not only for the twelve but also for all who would come to faith through their witness. This passage gives insight into what our Lord thought was important for us.

Let's begin by reading Jesus' last prayer for his disciples.

John 17

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message (He's praying for you!), that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Observations:

-- Eternal life is found in knowing God.

-- We are given to Jesus, out of this world.

-- Jesus was in the world but is no longer. He is very cognizant of the fact that we are still in the world and prays for our protection. He knows it is a dangerous life.

-- Jesus is not of the world and so we are no longer of the world, the consequence of which is a discord between the world and us.

-- Jesus specifically does not pray for us to be taken out of the world. He wants us here. This is not a holding ground until we get to heaven. He goes on to say that he has sent us into the world as he was sent. We are sent into the world with purpose.

-- We are sent so that the world might believe. This is very world-affirming.

-- He wants us to see him clearly. He longs for us.

-- Jesus, even now continues the work of making God known to the world.

What does “in the world but not of the world” mean? And perhaps more importantly, what doesn’t it mean? The word “in” refers to location. The kingdom is located in this world, in our physical universe and among its people, even among those who do not know the king. It is important to note that the kingdom is eternal and therefore not limited to this physical universe, but it does include the physical universe.

“Of the world” or “not of the world” refers to the organizational principles of the kingdom in which we reside, to its authority base. There are two kingdoms operating in the universe today. There is the fallen kingdom that operates according to fallen principles and there is Christ’s kingdom that operates according to the principles of God. The kingdom of God is not organized according to the same principles as the world. According to the Barnes’ Notes, when Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world he was saying, “it is not of the same nature as earthly kingdoms. It was not originated for the same purpose, or conducted on the same plan.”⁵

Jesus was intentionally setting up a tension between being living in the world but not of this world. He was telling us that we are to live in the world as his kingdom is in the world. This means that we must not hold our selves aloof to the people and institutions of the societies we live in, but rather we are to be very engaged in them. It is impossible to engage people without entering their culture. However we are not to be of the world, we are to remain distinct from the organizing principles of the fallen world, living differently and influencing those systems without being influenced by them. We are to live according to kingdom culture amidst the fallen culture.

Paul’s addresses this same issue with the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, *“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler -- not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.”*

King Solomon explains the tension like this: *I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp one thing, and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.* Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

The term used among missiologists to describe the concept of living in the world but not of the world is missional. To be missional, a church or an individual engages the world around them as an insider rather than an outsider. To be missional is to be evangelistic and MUCH more. Tim

Keller describes five elements of a missional church that can also apply to the individual believer.⁶

1. Missional people speak in the vernacular of the wider world.

Our words and how we speak define us and give us our place in society. With our language we can include or exclude, we can engage or ostracize, we can intrigue or offend. As a result missional people choose their words carefully, avoiding church jargon and explaining religious terms when necessary, even among church friends. They always speak as if non-believers are present. In order to speak as an insider missional people refuse to use we/them language, which unnecessarily alienates non-believers. When we aim to engage the culture with humility and joy our words will be gentle and worthy of consideration, even to those who deeply disagree with us.

2. Missional people enter and re-tell the story of the culture with the gospel.

Missional people enter culture when they show sympathy toward and deep acquaintance for the literature, music and theater of the culture. To enter culture we must understand the hopes and dreams of the culture, we must know the heroic narratives and understand the stress points in the culture. We must know the story before we can re-tell it by showing how only in Christ can the culture be all it aspires to be.

3. Missional people trained for public life and vocation.

Missional people are trained and able to face radically non-Christian values in their public life- work and neighborhoods. They are able to think Christianly and work with Christian distinctiveness; understanding which part of the wider culture can be accepted, what needs to be rejected and what can be adapted or revised. Missional people use the gospel to demonstrate true biblical love toward those with whom they deeply differ.

4. Missional people create Christian community, which is counter to the culture and counter-intuitive.

In community, missional people go far beyond nurturing relationships to embody that which is counter culture - showing the world how radically different a Christian society is, particularly in regard to sex, money and power. To be missional we must be deeply and practically committed to both deeds of compassion and social justice and to evangelism.

5. Missional people practice Christian unity as much as possible. Missional people do not alienate or judge other Christians whose beliefs and practices differ from their own. They don't

bash other churches or other believers but seek to cooperate with other believers on behalf of the kingdom.

Why is it so difficult to live in the world and yet not be of the world? What are the dangers that Jesus mentioned in his prayer in John 17? These questions are vital to our ability to live skillfully in and for the kingdom because when we fail to keep the proper tension that Jesus sets up, it becomes impossible to be missional. There are at least two ways that we can fail to keep the proper tension between being in the world and not of the world.

We can create a separation that refuses to be missional. First, because of an improper fear that we may become polluted by society, we keep a safe distance from the people and cultural institutions around us, and choose to be **neither in the world nor of it**. This happens when a misshaped sense of holiness causes us to separate ourselves out from the world. We burrow into our Christian fellowships and refuse to get our hands dirty with the problems of a fallen society. We are willing to tell people about Jesus and bring them out of the world but we are either unwilling or incapable of living in the world and addressing the problems of society.

When we refuse to live in the world we are in constant danger of succumbing to legalism and pride. Legalism, because in order to set ourselves apart from the world we need lots of rules to tell us how we are doing. We need rigid boundaries to ensure that we don't inadvertently do anything that is considered worldly. Legalism is often found in tandem with spiritual pride. We become proud of our own holiness and our ability to be better than those around us. This deadly combination can tear us from dependence on the Lord and allow us to grow in our own self-sufficiency. In so doing we appear harsh and judgmental to those we are trying to reach. Instead of providing gospel solutions for society, our gospel becomes irrelevant to those needs. Instead of the sweet aroma of Christ, we become repugnant to non-believers.

We can seek an integration that is incapable of being missional. Secondly, because an improper confidence in our abilities to remain holy and untouched by the world we can over identify with the world system and thus *live both in the world and of or by the world systems*. Over-identification with the world often comes from either a drive to be relevant or a fear of rejection. In either case there is an unwillingness to draw lines between right and wrong. We simply don't want to offend. Instead of being judgmental, like the person who refuses to live in the world, the person who over-identifies lives according to the world's systems and is undiscerning and often compromising.

A desire not to offend is not all bad. But instead of doing the hard work of speaking words of life- words that are both *loving* and *true* -the person who over-identifies with the world takes the easy road of compromise.

Safeguards for keeping the right tension. There are several things that we can do, that when taken together safeguard our walk with Jesus and help us to maintain our effectiveness in his kingdom work.

Safeguard #1: We can learn to see the world in the light of the gospel.

The gospel as illuminator: C.S. Lewis wrote about a time when he went into a dark tool shed on a sunny day. The only light coming into the shed came from a small hole in the roof. Surprised that the light did little to illuminate the shed, Lewis took a closer look at the light. As he gazed at the intense beam of light coming down from above all he could see was the thousands of dust particles floating in the air. In curiosity he climbed up near the light source and instead of looking *at* the light he looked down *with* the beam of light. From this vantage point Lewis was able to cooperate with the light and the whole shed became visible and clear.⁷

Lewis later mused that this is analogous to how we are to use the light of the gospel to best understand the world we live in. We need to look at the gospel light (Bible study and reading) but we also need to know how to look with the gospel light so that it illuminates our world and gives us clearer understanding. This is why it has been said that Christians are in the greatest position of understanding when they have a Bible in one hand and a daily newspaper in the other.

Understanding the world in the light of the gospel involves understanding the gospel and understanding the world. If we are to live effective lives we must understand what it is that Jesus expects, in contrast to what it is that those people around us, who live according to the world system, expect. Armed with both of these understandings we can act appropriately.

The Kingdom Story looks at a framework for understanding the world that allows us to look with the light of the gospel to see the world clearly, *Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation* (CFRC). Let's consider how we can use this framework to illuminate our understanding of the world and to make biblically faithful decisions and choices. The point of a healthy and biblically faithful worldview is to help you best understand yourself and the world you live in. It helps you think Christianly about every aspect of life.

There are two default patterns for understanding the world that can derail your ability to think clearly. Some people find it difficult to think in principles and thus they tend to over emphasize authority. This person will try to find specific airtight answers for every situation in the Bible. The temptation of course is to create specific answers if none exist. The Bible becomes a rigid set of rules rather than a living document.

Other people find it difficult to think in absolutes and they tend to under emphasize authority. This person views the Bible as a loose set of guidelines and so elevates himself to the position of final authority. The Bible becomes a weak set of inspirational sayings with no power for life.

Young kids typically have a very difficult time thinking in principles. They want hard and fast rules that won't change. Recently my daughter came to me with a question that revealed her desire for rules. She asked me if she was right in thinking that drinking wine was wrong. As a parent

I want to help my daughter develop her ability to understand the world in the light of the gospel. It would have been very easy to simply answer the question with either yes or no. But neither of these answers would help her think Christianly about drinking alcohol.

Instead I used the CFRC framework to help her see the world in a more biblically faithful light. We looked at what alcohol was meant to be, why it was created and all the good uses for alcohol, including worship, fellowship and to make the heart glad. She was especially surprised to read in Deuteronomy 14:26 that not only wine but also strong drink can be used to celebrate the presence of God. But then we had to consider how alcohol is abused in our fallen world. We named alcoholism and drunk driving among the heart-breaking affects of sin. After looking at what alcohol *ought to be* (creation) and *what it is* (the fall) we looked at *what it can be* (through redemption.) Jesus incorporated wine into our celebration of communion. And as he fills us with his Spirit we can restore the use of alcohol, as it ought to be. Ultimately, when history is consummated, wine will no longer be abused.

In using the CFRC framework for understanding the world, I was able to take the focus of our conversation from alcohol being bad, which is incorrect, and place it on the abuse of alcohol being bad, which is more biblically faithful. This framework can help you make decisions in all areas of life as you learn to look at any given situation in the light of the gospel.

Safeguard #2: We can cultivate our love for God, humility and a healthy conscience.

As we develop our love for God it becomes more difficult to compromise what we know to be true for the sake of the approval of people. Our love relationship with our Lord is both the purpose or end objective of life and the means to the end. It is this relationship that pulls us back when we become either too judgmental or too accepting of the world around us. It is because of this love that we can be bold even at the risk of failure.

Humility is essential. It keeps us from the sins of legalism and pride that tempt us when we want to become separate from the world. And it protects us from the improper self-confidence that presumes to be immune to the worldly system. Proper humility comes only from time with God himself.

A healthy conscience is one that understands right from wrong and reacts when you do something wrong. To keep your conscience healthy you must respond to it by choosing right over wrong, doing right and repenting of wrong. Your conscience becomes seared when you ignore it.

Safeguard #3: We can choose to live in community with others who desire to be missional and therefore are living in but not of the world.

One of the many reasons God calls us to live in community is so that we can take appropriate risks without fear. When living in proper community we can be assured of two things, first that we are striving to live according

to kingdom principles and second that we will have relationships substantial enough to call us back when we miss the mark or stray from life as God designed it. This gives us incredible freedom to explore the boundaries of our faith.

Safeguard #4: When we live to serve others and the societies in which we live, rather than to prosper ourselves we are less likely to succumb to the pressures of the world system.

This safeguard is founded on the principle that we can't both pillage the society we live in (try to get all it has to offer us) while at the same time serve it. True Christian service calls for humility and for an accountability to God that allows us to find our confidence in him. Service founded in him therefore takes the edge off our greed, off of our competitiveness and off other aggressive behavior. Service therefore lets us live in the world without succumbing to the world because we are not on the world's agenda.

Conclusion:

We have been sent into this world just as Jesus was sent into the world. We have been sent on a purposeful mission and we should not be biding our time until we can get to something better, until we can get to what we were made for. Through us the unredeemed creation can know Jesus and believe in him. (John 17:21) But in order to be effective in our kingdom responsibilities we must be willing and able to live in the world, immersed in its culture, engaging its people without becoming entangled with the organizing principles of the world.

Chapter 3 - *The Realm of New Life*

Summary Points:

- Eternal life is something that begins now it is not something to be entered into after we die.
- The kingdom of God interfaces with the world we live in by being "in" but "not of" this world.
- If we fail to keep the right tension between living "in" the world but not "of" the world we will either create a separation that refuses to be missional or an integration that is incapable of being missional.
- There are four safeguards for keeping the right tension.
 - o We can learn to see the world in the light of the gospel.
 - o We can cultivate our love for God, humility and a healthy conscience.
 - o We can choose to live in community with others who desire to be missional and therefore are living in but not of the world.
 - o We live to serve others and the societies rather than to prosper ourselves.

Chapter 4 - The Scope of New Life In Christ

Eternal Living Today

Life, according to the dictionary, is “that interval between birth or conception and death.”⁸ That seems clear enough; life is what happens between when we are born and when we die. So when Jesus promises us eternal life what exactly is he offering? For many, eternal life simply means heaven, which seems to make Jesus’ offer only good after we die. But let’s look at eternal life in light of our dictionary definition. If life is what happens between birth and death, then eternal life starts at spiritual birth and never ends. **That means we are living eternally today.** Our new life has a new scope, eternity.

Eternal life and therefore eternal living starts in this life not the next. We will be living the same life in heaven that we are living here and now. Our life is extended eternally, meaning that our heavenly life is an extension of our current life. Eternal life is not a place, i.e. heaven; it’s a way of living.

In the Book of Revelation we see that our actions today, our “deeds” and “acts of righteousness” will follow us into eternity – we are becoming today who we will be forever. *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."* Revelation 14:13

And again in Revelation 19:7-9, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her [the bride or the church] to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."*

Because our new life is eternal in scope our acts and deeds – what we do in this life – have eternal significance for both now and the future. Jesus expects us to begin living eternally, today. However, because of the fall we are no longer equipped to live the kind of life we were created for. There is a tension in the life of all Christians – we were made for a life that seems difficult if not impossible to live. Paul laments this tension in Romans 7:15, *"For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."*

This tension affects not only our personal piety but also the social outworking of our faith. In *Five Smooth Stones*, Tom Nelson connects our public life to our personal spirituality, “Our seeming ineffectiveness in battling for our culture is directly related to our inability to conquer the battles raging in our own individual souls.”⁹

The tension we feel in this life comes from the “now and not yet” aspect of the sanctification process. The word sanctification means to be set apart for sacred use, but it also means to be made holy or pure. When God invades our life with his love and forgiveness he sets us apart for his wonderful purposes. At the same time he begins a work of purification in us. That’s the “now” aspect of sanctification. However, we will continue

to live as broken people in a broken world until we meet our Lord face to face in glory. That's the "not-yet" aspect of our faith. God has deliberately chosen not to remove us from this world or to perfect us instantaneously upon conversion. The process is intentional not a mistake, however as a result, it can seem like there is an internal battle raging inside our souls and we can be mystified at our own behavior.

Recognizing the battle within we need to discover what we must do today to enter fully into the life that has been offered to us. Dallas Willard gives us a glimpse of the struggle *and* the solution in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*; "We soon learn...that there is much more in us than what we can consciously command. We find how hard it is to discern and to harmonize the *whole* self with the will and personality of God. Yet even as we reach for more grace to this end, we also learn by experience that the harmonization of our total self with God will not be done *for* us. *We* must act."¹⁰

This acting involves choosing a certain kind of lifestyle, one of intentionally entering into our relationship with Jesus in a way that expands our capacity to know and love him, to walk more closely with him. Jesus then, through our relationship with him expands our ability to live according to his kingdom principles. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to this lifestyle as disciplined discipleship. Tom Nelson refers to it as becoming an apprentice of Jesus Christ.

Sandwiched between the Great Commandment and the Great Commission is what Nelson, refers to as The Great Invitation. In Matthew 11:28-30 we are invited to take the yoke of Jesus and learn from him, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

Jesus invites us to be yoked with him, making ourselves his apprentice so that *he* can teach us how to live the Christian life. This yoking is very relational and results in transformational living. But how do we yoke ourselves or connect ourselves to Jesus? The means to this apprenticeship or pressing into Jesus is often through practicing the spiritual disciplines.

Dallas Willard says, "The disciplines for the spiritual life, rightly understood, are time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as new men or women to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves. They help by assisting the ways of God's Kingdom to take the place of the habits of sin embedded in our bodies."¹¹

Jesus demonstrated a rhythm of engagement and withdrawal in his life and ministry. In the gospels we frequently see him pressed by the crowds, ministering to the needy and then afterwards we see him go away to a lonely place. Like Jesus we cannot control the busyness of life but we can develop a rhythm of engagement and withdrawal.

The spiritual disciplines we choose to practice fall into this same rhythm of engagement and withdrawal. As a result the disciplines tend to fall into one of two categories, public - those practiced in the press of engagement,

and private – those practiced in times of withdrawal. Private disciplines are forms of personal piety that are undertaken apart from the rush of daily life such as *prayer, fasting, solitude* and *Bible study*. There are also disciplines that are more public, or are at least undertaken in the midst of life's pressing moments. These include the disciplines of *thanksgiving, surrender* and *imitation*. There are an unlimited number of spiritual disciplines that you can practice in order to develop a closer walk with Jesus. We will consider just a few.

Disciplines of Engagement: Public Apprenticeship.

The Discipline of Thanksgiving.

I was reading in the back of the taxi as we drove from Hangzhou to Shanghai. My husband was holding our baby daughter. They were both sleeping. It was early morning and a shroud of clouds was producing a cold drizzle. My face was pressed up against the cool of the window. It was quiet and I was happy.

Suddenly I was aware that something happened. I couldn't see, my eyes weren't shut but my vision was full of the color brown. I couldn't hear. It was as if I had been cut off from the world. I couldn't sense that I was tumbling, flying through the air but I couldn't really tell for sure. I cried out – did I really? Did my words ever pass my lips or was I just forming mental queries? "Have we been hit? Have we been in an accident?" My mind reached out for understanding but for some reason I had been cut off from all reality – all except for one. The only thing I knew for certain was that God was good. As I tumbled around in the back of that taxi I declared the goodness of my God and gave thanks despite the possible outcome of the situation.

I woke up several minutes later. My head pressed against the grill that separated the driver's seat from the back seat. The driver was slumped over, unconscious. I could hear my daughter crying. My husband was silently ignoring her. Why? I couldn't move or turn my head to look. Was he dead? I could do nothing to help. I knew that I was going to pass out again. My prayer was a mental acknowledgement that I would rest in Jesus' goodness. I gave thanks again because this was one of those "all-things." My thankfulness was for his goodness regardless of what I would find when I would wake. I blacked out.

No one was more surprised than I was by my worship and thanksgiving in my time of crisis. Until that moment the thought of losing my husband had at times paralyzed me. How was it that I was able to give thanks as I faced my greatest fears? It was grace. And it was discipline. For years I had practiced the discipline of thanksgiving. For years I had meditated on the goodness of God. I had seen his goodness and given thanks in the deepest, most tender realms of my soul, especially in the

face of painful disappointments. I knew, beyond faith, by experience that my God was indeed good.

This story, ended well, my husband, my daughter and I all survived the accident with no long -term injuries, and the accident is a reminder to me that determined and disciplined thanksgiving is a life-giving habit for people of the kingdom.. Years of thanksgiving produced a confident assurance of God's ultimate goodness. The commands and promises associated with giving thanks run throughout Scripture. Consider just a few:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19, *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6-7, *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Colossians 3:17, *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*

The discipline of thanksgiving is fairly simple to practice and yet not always easy. It simply involves a determined will to give thanks and accept all that happens to us as coming from the goodness of God. Even those things that touch our lives because of the fallen world are allowed to touch us because of God's ultimate goodness. Giving thanks in painful situations is an expression of faith in God's involvement in the created order. It says that he is bigger and stronger than the world we live in and that he has not removed his hand from that world. Our pain can be redemptive both in our own lives as well as in the lives of others.

The Disciplines of Surrender and Imitation. In the gospels people come to Jesus for only one reason, they want their needs met. But Jesus offers so much more than a quick fix. The lame man wanted to walk but Jesus offered forgiveness as well, and to the woman caught in adultery he says, "Your sins are forgiven, go your way and sin no more." But how do we go our way and sin no more? As we saw in chapter one of this article there has to be more to overcoming sin than exercising more willpower.

It is God that changes us, transforms us and makes us grow. As such our willpower is impotent when it comes to making lasting changes. That's why surrender, not willpower, is the key to a transformed life. How do we exercise surrender as a discipline?

Surrender, like thanksgiving, is something we practice in the press of life. It is a matter of giving God sway in our life at the moment we realize there is a conflict between his will and ours. Simple enough, but it's not always easy. Surrender involves choosing obedience rather than knowingly committing sin. Surrender flies in the face of the cavalier saying, "It's better to ask forgiveness than permission."

Consider the burnt offerings and sacrifice mentioned in 1 Samuel 15:22. These are sin offerings, but God prefers obedience. *"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams."*

The discipline of surrender is closely linked to the discipline of imitation because imitating the behavior of our Lord goes against our earthly culture and fallen nature. Imitation often requires surrender, and both come down to choosing kingdom principles when we could more easily win by choosing earthly principles.

It is impossible to imitate Jesus without knowing what he did and how he did it. Imitation involves more than just actions it involves adopting the attitude of Christ. Philippians 2:5-9, *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

If we are to become like Jesus we must view the world and ourselves as Jesus views us. We must adopt how he thinks as our way of thinking. This combination of what we do and how we think is captured in Romans 12:1-2, *I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

If we are to imitate Christ we must orient our actions and attitudes around the love of God. This is what St. Augustine referred to as ordering our loves, or loving what God loves, as God loves, in the order that God loves. In *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, Robert Louis Wilken addresses St. Augustine's view of living a virtuous life, "Jesus had said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.' For early Christians the moral life was the religious life, a life oriented to God's love, and the first and greatest love, the love that animates all other loves, is the love of God. Only in seeking God, in following God, in holding on to God is virtue possible."¹²

Jeanne Guyon asks, *"What does it mean to give your whole heart to God? To give your whole heart to God is to have all the energy of your soul always centered on Him."*¹³ If we are to live our lives according to kingdom principles we must order our loves and orient them to God's love, loving him with our whole self. This is achieved in part through surrender and through imitation.

Disciplines of Withdrawal: Private Apprenticeship.

This section provides a brief description of four disciplines of withdrawal. Much of the insight for this section is drawn from *Five Smooth Stones* by Tom Nelson.

The Discipline of Solitude. Solitude is the building block for all other spiritual disciplines. It is time alone, away from all distractions for uninterrupted time with the Lord.

Solitude mitigates the busyness of modern life. Life in a global city brings with it an extreme amount of noise. Not just audio noise but visual noise as well. Horns honking and neon lights flashing, messages via the Internet and on the sides of buses all press in to the inner sanctum of the mind. Technology is noisy.

Solitude gives us the opportunity to pull away from the society of others and to quiet the noise that comes crashing in upon us. But more than this it gives us the opportunity to quiet the noise in our souls. Tom Nelson says that, "when we enter solitude our focus is to give our whole heart to God and to fix the energy of our soul on Christ. Through the discipline of solitude we focus our soul on Jesus alone."¹⁴

Jesus knew the importance of times of solitude. Throughout his public life he was in the practice of withdrawing from the crowds for prayer, meditation and rest. He began his ministry in the solitude of the desert preparing for the temptation that was to come. (Matthew 4:1-3) He repeatedly sought a lonely place for retreat and called his disciples to do the same. (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:31; Luke 4:42; 5:16) And Jesus ended his ministry in the solitude of Gethsemane preparing for the cross. (Matthew 26:36)

The discipline of solitude requires intentional planning and determination. If you are to practice this vital discipline you will need to work to find the time and place to do so. Other good things may need to be eliminated from your schedule.

The Discipline of Prayer. Sometimes a feeling of guilt immediately follows a call to prayer. But once the guilt fades I am left with an overwhelming sense of inadequacy, which eventually gives way to boredom. Is this really what our Lord had in mind when he told us to pray? Is this how he viewed communication with his Heavenly Father?

Prayer is an ongoing, intimate conversation between God and a believer. When we think of prayer as a conversation with God we can begin to see some of our faulty thinking. Often our emphasis in prayer is solely on receiving what we ask for or altering our situation in some way. But prayer is more than supplication, it is speaking to God, and it is also listening to him. Tom Nelson writes, "Prayer involves asking, but it is so much more than a pragmatic means to get what we want. Prayer is a transforming friendship."¹⁵

The discipline of prayer was a priority for Jesus. His times of solitude were marked by prayer and often fasting. His example in prayer and his call to pray make prayer a distinctive mark on the life of those who seek to follow him. If Jesus needed time with the Father, how much more do we? Our tendency to be self-sufficient is contrary to our need for God, expressed in prayer. But our need for God in our lives is far more real than any pretense to self-reliance.

The Discipline of Fasting. Of all the spiritual disciplines, fasting may be the one most open to exploitation. It is so uncommon in the non-spiritual realm and so it stands out as a very pious activity, as such it can also be a very self-righteous activity. Fasting can seem like a means of accomplishing a spiritual or religious agenda, almost as if when we add fasting to our prayer God is somehow obliged to answer our prayers as we think he should.

The real purpose of fasting is not to accomplish our agenda but to put ourselves before the Lord in a way that allows him to accomplish his agenda in, for and through us. This means that fasting isn't so much a way to get things done but a way to develop a greater intimacy with God.

William Bright, a prominent Christian leader in the west, spent the last several years of his life dedicated to prayer and fasting on the behalf of the world and the people of his home culture. He established a council for prayer and fasting to help church pastors enlist their congregations in prayer on behalf of the nation. To fund this project, he donated the full proceeds of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, which he won in 1996, valued at more than a million U.S. dollars. Bright understood that the discipline of spiritual fasting unleashed a power for transformation. He writes, "Fasting reduces the power of self so that the Holy Spirit can do a more intense work within us."

In Isaiah we see that fasting unleashes power for transformation at all levels; the inner person, the physical body, within the family and within society at large. Isaiah speaks of fasting with the purpose of loosening the chains of injustice and breaking all kinds of yokes (enslavements) especially of oppression. Fasting helps us deal with the poor and the marginal people of society.

The passage also gives insight into some pitfalls of fasting as well as its eventual results. Read Isaiah 58:3-11 and make note of the benefits and pitfalls.

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?"

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard."

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

The Discipline of Bible Study. To love God we must know God. Tom Nelson writes, "Loving God intimately is not only an experiential journey of the heart but also a journey of the mind. As Jesus' apprentices, we are called to vigorously engage in the life of the mind."¹⁶

When Jesus calls us to love the Lord with our whole mind, he calls us to a faith that requires rigorous intellectual activity. Interestingly enough, the Old Testament version of the Great Commandment does not include loving God with our whole mind. The New Testament, based on the life and words of Jesus is full of admonitions for the mind. Peter exhorts his readers to "gird your minds" (1 Peter 1:13) and Paul exhorts Timothy to "study to show yourself approved by God." (2 Timothy 2:15)

Again Nelson notes that, "Authentic Christianity not only transforms the heart; but also transforms the mind. Romans 12:2 instructs, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.'"¹⁷

Through the study of God's word we devote ourselves to knowing him rightly and loving him purely. As we read and study the word of God we let it sink into our minds and shape our view of God. This allows us to love him properly, for who he really is. We cannot order our loves according to his loves if we don't know those loves. Without a proper knowledge of God's revelation of himself we are left to determine his character according to our own whims.

This knowledge of God can only be obtained through reading, study, and meditation on the Holy Scriptures.

Chapter 4 -The Scope of New Life

Summary Points:

- Because our new life is eternal in scope our acts and deeds - what we do in this life - have eternal significance for both today and tomorrow.
- There is a tension in the life of all Christians - we were made for a life that seems difficult if not impossible to live.
- Recognizing the battle within we need to discover what we must do today to enter fully into the life that has been offered to us.
- Jesus invites us to be yoked with him, making ourselves his apprentice so that *he* can teach us how to live the Christian life. This yoking with Jesus often comes through practicing the spiritual disciplines.
- The spiritual disciplines resemble the same rhythm of engagement and withdrawal that Jesus practiced.

Summary

Eternal living results when we come into contact with God and he **infuses our life with his own life** (vitality) with the result that we **live, now and forever** (scope) **within the kingdom of God** (realm) taking on **kingdom responsibility** according to **kingdom principles** (orientation).

The bright hope of the gospel is for now and forever. It is the promise of God to indwell his people and to give each one of us new life and a new kind of living, even now within this fallen and broken world.

The life we are meant to live is multi-faceted and complex because of the conflicting agendas and overlapping processes that simultaneously touch our lives. It is rich with promise and possibility and sometimes full of pain. But in everything the redemptive touch of our Lord is at work.

The spiritual realm is full of paradoxes, which take time to fully understand. The world system and the kingdom of God have starkly different agendas. And conflicting agendas are not limited to outside our person; our own nature is at cross-purposes as we continually strive to do the right thing. We are being sanctified in the midst of the conflict, yet our sanctification has a "now" and "not-yet" aspect to it that can be baffling at times. In all this we are becoming God's agents of restoration, able to do his work with joy and hope, offering new life and a new way of living to others who need to know Jesus. And one happy day our hopes will be fully realized.

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
"But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing,
And her people for gladness.
"I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people;
And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

Isaiah 65:17-19

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¹ *The Call*, Chapter 4, page 29

² A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of Man*, Christian Publications Inc., Camp Hill, PA, 1978, page 100

³ Bonhoeffer

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit Of The Disciplines*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, CA, 1988, Page 28

⁵ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft

⁶ The concepts presented in this passage are taken from, *The Missional Church*, Tim Keller, June 2001

⁷ Meditation in a Tool Shed, C.S. Lewis, Coventry Evening Telegraph, July 1945

⁸ The American Heritage Dictionary, American Heritage Publishing Co., New York, NY, 1969, see life

⁹ Tom Nelson, *Five Smooth Stones*, Cross Training Publishing, Grand Island, NE, 2001, Page 53

¹⁰ *The Spirit Of The Disciplines*, Page 68

¹¹ *The Spirit Of The Disciplines*, Chapter 6, page 86

¹² Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, Yale University, USA, 2003, page 289

¹³ Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, Seedsowers Publishing, Jacksonville, FL, Page 108

¹⁴ *Five Smooth Stones*, Pages 78 and 90

¹⁵ *Five Smooth Stones*, Page 101

¹⁶ *Five Smooth Stones*, Page 119

¹⁷ *Five Smooth Stones*, Page 122