

Week 1

LIFE; Beyond Death



FRIDAY: Day 1 - Good Reasons for Good Habits

Forming godly habits are not about being a better person, they are about savouring and enjoying God through Jesus.

Galatians 2:20

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



When I was at Bible College, Spiritual Disciplines was a compulsory subject in first year. The course taught us the value of forming good Christian habits, and what those habits should look like in practice. I don't remember much of the course, except that godliness seemed horribly tedious, and that there was a really big gap between me and the victorious Christian life.

I tried getting out of bed to read the Bible & pray before dawn, but I was too tired to concentrate. I tried fasting, but only when I felt guilty about something. I tried going off by myself for a day of silence and solitude but I got bored and fell asleep.

Yet at that same point in my life, I was totally captured by the message of God's cleansing, forgiveness and new life through Jesus' death in my place. My heart and my mind had been completely transformed. I was at Bible College because I wanted to spend my life telling people about Jesus, helping them to connect with Him and receive the same life that I had received from Him. I couldn't figure out why the habits of Christian living seemed so lifeless.

What I failed to grasp in my early Christian life was that godly habits (spiritual disciplines) are not cultivated by moral effort. They are habitual expressions of love for Jesus. I loved reading the Bible and talked with God throughout the day – just not so much at 5:00am. I could lie by myself for an hour or more, staring at the ceiling trying to comprehend how God could become man so that He could suffer & die to rescue people who hated Him. When I fasted, my grumbling stomach reminded me to think about my spiritual diet and grieve my inconsistent hunger for God.

Forming godly habits is about making the choice to savour and enjoy God on a regular basis. It's learning to follow Jesus more closely irrespective of the cost. It's about living the new life that He has given us: loving and honouring Jesus, who first loved us and gave Himself for us.

Head: Think about your motives for wanting to be a better follower of Jesus. Is it for your own sake, or for the sake of Jesus and others?

Heart: Jesus personally died for your sin and wrongdoing, and He is personally present in you through the Holy Spirit. How does that reality impact your desire to form godly habits?

Hands: Choose a time-based spiritual discipline (prayer, solitude, fasting, journaling etc.) and set aside three 45 minute timeslots in your week to begin learning the habit. Focus on savouring and enjoying God through Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I don't want to have impure motives: please give me a pure heart in my striving to live for you. Thank you that you are with me to give me all that I need to form godly habits that honour you. Help me to refuse selfish behaviour and to pursue habits that are consistent with the life that you bought for me at the cross and have delivered to me by your grace. AMEN.

A song to listen to: [This Life I Live](#)

Damien Carson

SATURDAY: Day 2 - New Life

The life of sin is ugly and deadly. Through his death and resurrection Jesus gives us new life in his Spirit who grows his character within us.

John 7:37-39

37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them". 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.



The benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing. With it, we can not only know what is happening, but why it is happening.

What used to be one of my favourite things to do when reading the Bible is "Israelite bashing". "Israelite bashing" is criticizing the Israelites, the Jews, or whoever is involved in the passage whenever they fall down. One of the reasons why I stopped doing it was because the people in the passages don't have the benefit of hindsight like we do. To judge them for this would be unfair. The Spirit hadn't been given at that point because Jesus hadn't been glorified yet. There was no way the hearers of this message could know the significance of Jesus' words until Jesus' resurrection,

which is understandable. After hearing this message, people were confused - not sure if Jesus was a prophet, the Christ, not the Christ. And I really don't blame them. It would've been a hard message to believe without the resurrection. The Pharisees who were at the Festival would've probably confused them further.

Another reason why I stopped "Israelite bashing" is because we are so much like the Israelites and the people in the Bible. We need Jesus to take away our old lives and give us new life just as much as the Israelites, Jews and Gentiles did. Jesus came for people like them and us. We are all sinners who need saving. But he gave us new life. This new life comes not from our own religious efforts but from our old lives dying at the cross. All we have to do is believe in Jesus and he will take our place on the cross. All our sins will be forgiven and we will receive his Spirit and eternal life in heaven.

In this passage, Jesus pictures the Spirit as a river of living water. The best way to glorify Jesus is to enjoy the water, praise the water, keep coming back to the water, point other people to the water, get strength for love from the water and never, never, never prefer any other drink in the world over this water. This is how we glorify God and receive new life in the Spirit.

Head: What do you think it means to receive the Spirit? How does the Spirit work within us?

Heart: In what ways have you embraced this new life in Jesus? In what areas have you struggled with the sin in your old life?

Hands: Jesus pictures the Spirit as a river of living water. What practical measures can you take to make sure that you never prefer any other drink in the world over this water?

Prayer: Father God, thank you for sending your son to die on the cross for my sins. Thank you for giving us new life in the Spirit and for forgiving us for the sins of our old lives. We're sorry for the times when we do fail you and prefer to drink the other sinful drinks of the world over your life purifying water. Please forgive us when this happens and help remind us that nothing compares to your love for us. Amen.

A Song to listen to: [Only You Can Satisfy](#)

Mick Lather

MONDAY: Day 3 - Breath of New Life

Can we be living yet dead?

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! ⁵This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"



Have you ever felt dead? We can feel dead in different ways. Sometimes I feel so tired and exhausted from a lot of activity that I have no energy whatsoever. Sometimes I can feel emotionally dead – very flat or numb. Sometimes I can feel spiritually dead when the good things of God hold no interest.

This is a fascinating passage from Ezekiel. It inspired the African-American slaves to write a famous song known as "Dry Bones Gonna Rise Again". For them it was a symbol of hope as they looked forward to a time of freedom from their lives of slavery.

This passage contains an amazing promise looking forward to a time when the people of Israel will again be settled but more than that to a time of a

resurrection.

In this passage, the bones cry out "our hope is gone, we are cut off". Have you ever felt like that? Cut off from hope or from help or cut off from the source of life?

When we feel like this we often feel hopeless when it comes to loving others or expressing joy or patience or feeling at peace. The upside of this passage is that God is promising to do a work on these dead, dry bones. God is going to breathe his Spirit into these bones and they will live again.

As we live in this world as God's children adopted into his kingdom through the work of his son Jesus on the cross – we can only live well when we rely on God's Spirit. We need to welcome God's Spirit into our lives on a daily basis and walk by that Spirit all day long. His Spirit will produce in us a way of life that goes beyond our natural sinful selves. His Spirit resurrects us daily to express the fruit of his Spirit.

This passage also reminds me of two other related incidents in the Gospels. After Jesus rose from the dead and before he ascended to his father he breathed on his disciples and instructed them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Also there is that strange comment in Matthew 27:53 where we see graves being opened and deceased holy people coming out of their graves and walking into town after Jesus' resurrection. On the one hand, very strange times and yet on the other we see the fulfilling of these ancient prophecies. And that leads me to conclude that God keeps his promises and those promises come all the way down through history to us. He has given us his Spirit which produces new life in us: A life of fruitfulness and grace and love towards God and others. It's the only way to produce this new life.

Head: When do you suffer from feeling dead or lifeless?

Heart: What do you need to change in your heart's attitude towards God's Spirit?

Hands: Is there someone in your life you can encourage to trust in God's Spirit to help them?

Prayer: Father God we thank you that you keep your promises. We thank you that Jesus made a way for us to receive your Spirit within us so that we may express your life to those around us. Help us to welcome and receive the ongoing work of your Spirit each day. Please forgive us when we resist your Spirit and think we can reform ourselves without your help.

A song to listen to: [Made alive](#)

Tim Hewlett

TUESDAY: Day 4 - Don't Play the Fool

It is never a nice feeling being fooled, so how does it happen?

Galatians 3:1-3

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ²I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?



In this passage we see the Apostle Paul very disappointed with the Galatians. So much so, that he calls them foolish. He can't imagine how they had been able to be so foolish except that they must be bewitched – out of their minds.

While the popular picture of a fool is a chap in a funny hat, entertaining the king's court with witty jokes and silly sayings, being a fool is much more serious.

It means rejecting wisdom and the resulting actions are foolishness.

The wisdom that the Galatians had rejected was the fact that Jesus's death on the cross was sufficient. After hearing the glorious message of grace, they had listened to other voices telling them that salvation wasn't finished at the cross, but that they had to earn it by keeping the law.

The tricky thing about being made a fool, is that we fall for things that look plausible. If it was really ridiculous, we might twig to the idea and leave it alone. But the Galatians were attracted to the idea of works of the law. It seemed a

worthy idea - after all, keeping the law was what the 'good' and 'wise' people did.

But the hidden foolishness in this wisdom is the lie that we can save ourselves by what we do. God has already saved us by giving His precious Son. There is nothing we can do that could come anywhere near that.

The law focusses on all our imperfections and serves to remind us how impossible it is to be righteous by our own works.

The grace of the Cross focusses on the perfection of the Lamb without blemish who offered Himself for us. Jesus makes it possible for us to be righteous by giving us His own righteousness, by covering our foolishness with His wisdom and love.

Let us not be fooled. Let us look to our wonderful Saviour and put all our trust in what He has done.

Head: Think of times you have been fooled into the same thing as the Galatians, thinking good works will save you.

Heart: Remember the words of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished". Keep that promise in your heart as you go about your day.

Hands: When you find yourself thinking on the good works that you are doing, lift them up to Jesus as a thank you for what He has already done.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please fill me with your wisdom and take away any foolishness of trusting in myself or my own deeds. Thank you that in Christ's death and resurrection, my salvation is complete. Amen

A song to listen to: [Made alive](#)

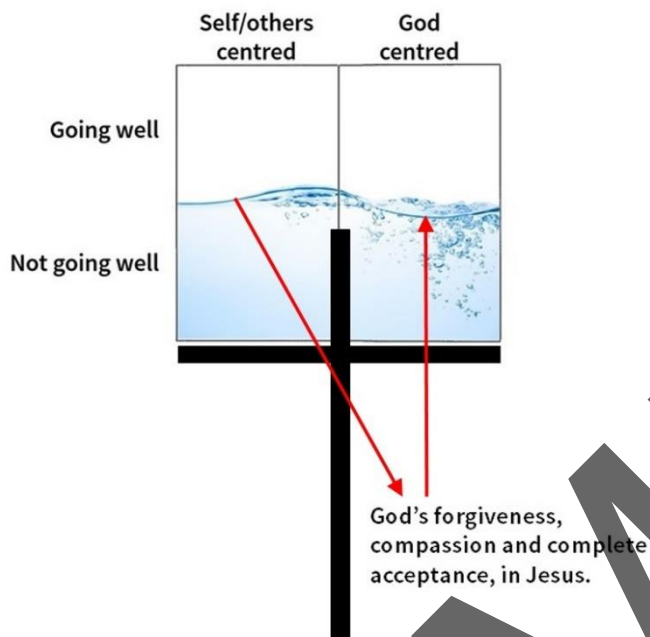
Nicole Davenport

WEDNESDAY: Day 5 - Let's Live Out Our New Self

Christians have had our identity or 'self' changed, and now our goal is to live according to that new self.

Colossians 3:5-10

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.



Reading this passage, what most caught my eye were the last two verses, and the concept of having our old selves 'taken off' and our new selves 'put on'.

The metaphor of taking off and putting on clothing reminded me of times where I've felt I should do a purge of my wardrobe. The old self is like discarding an old, shabby, embarrassing set of clothes. A few items that have previously been in my wardrobe come to mind...one particularly sorry-looking jacket, with the zipper broken, the collar terribly frayed, and a hole in one of the sleeves, in particular. I was a bit sad to see it go, but looking back it's definitely a good thing that I discarded it! For everybody involved.

Perhaps that's similar to how a part of us can feel sad to let go of sin. It's comfortable, it's familiar. But it is so much better for us (and 'for everybody involved') that we discard it.

I think the last two verses are a great little summary. The past tense of 'taken off' and 'put on' means that this is an event that has already occurred for us as Christians. Jesus has changed our identity. How comforting that can be! To know that deep down, Jesus has given us a new self. He's given us a brand spanking new set of clothes. What's left for us to do is bring our behaviour in line with our new identity as loved children of God.

Head: There's a "therefore" in verse 5 – look back at the verses preceding it. Why, according to Paul, should we put to death what is earthly in us?

Heart: How can the fact that Jesus has given us a new self, a new identity, give you comfort and assurance?

Hands: How can the fact that Jesus has given us a new self, a new identity, give you motivation to put to death the old self? What example of this comes to mind?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you that you have given me a new self and a new identity. Help me to believe that even on the days where the evidence of that may be harder to see. I pray that you would transform me, so that my behaviour falls closer in line with my new identity as a loved child of yours. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

A song to listen to: [Raised with Christ](#)

David Lather

THURSDAY: Day 6 - True freedom from sin

Does the verse below mean that if you “walk by the Spirit”, there will be no room in your life for sin?

Galatians 5:16

16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.



What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”? This verse – taken on its own – seems to say that if you “walk by the Spirit”, it will be impossible for you to “gratify the desires of the flesh”. Does this mean that if you “walk by the Spirit”, there will be no room in your life for sin?

Think about your own life following Jesus. Think about the lives of those around you who follow Jesus. Our everyday experience is that sin exists. We still do it. We know other Christians who sin. We often chose to “gratify the desires of the flesh”. Do you feel this tension in your life? What does it mean for your relationship with God?

First, the passage doesn’t say, “... walk by the Spirit, and you will not experience the desires of the flesh”. Instead, it acknowledges that in the Christian life, as we walk by the Spirit, the desires of the flesh will be very real and present in our lives. That is, it’s normal to keep feeling the temptation to sin – which means it’s not sinful to feel the desire to sin. Feeling the desire to sin – and struggling with this – is part of the challenge of life in a sinful world as we walk with the Spirit. If you feel this tension in your life, good! It means that the Spirit is convicting you of sin, and also that sin is not the way God wants life to be.

Second, it could be very easy to read this verse and question whether we are truly saved by Jesus. We may reverse the logic so we think it’s saying something like “if you gratify the desires of the flesh, then you’re not walking by the Spirit”. Read like this, Galatians 5:16 could lead us to despair and not reassurance that we are saved.

However, the book of Galatians has a clear message: life following Jesus is freedom from rules and guilt. Galatians 5:16 isn’t demanding a perfect life as evidence that we are “walking by the Spirit”. Instead, it’s telling us that as we walk by the Spirit, Jesus declares us “not guilty”. When we have God’s Spirit living in our hearts, God looks at us but doesn’t see all the mess of our lives. Instead, he sees all the perfection of Jesus – the only one who never gratified the desires of the flesh.

Walking by the Spirit gives us true freedom from sin – even as we continue to navigate the mess of life in a sinful world.

Head: What do you think your relationship with God depends on: Jesus’ perfection or your own? Does your answer to this question ring true for you in every day life?

Heart: Do you ever feel too sinful to be accepted by Jesus? Confess your sin, and rejoice in complete forgiveness and acceptance by God.

Hands: How can you help those in your Growth Group reflect on the freedom we have in the Spirit?

Prayer: Father God, I am not perfect. I feel the temptation to sin, and often I do sin. Please forgive me. Thank you that Jesus lived life exactly as you intended me to live. Thank you that he wasn’t just modelling a good life for me, but that he has paid the penalty for all of my sin. Thank you for freeing me from an impossible task of perfection – I rejoice that you look at me and see Jesus’ perfection, not my mess. Please help me as I struggle to live for him in a sin-filled world. Help me to not gratify the desires of the flesh – but also to remember that my guilt has been removed in Jesus. In his name I pray, Amen.

A song to listen to: [Made alive](#)

Katharine Yock

FAMILY GROWTH

Week 1: Life; Beyond Death

Big idea

Because of sin we are like dead trees growing rotten fruit. Jesus makes us living trees which begin to grow good fruit.

Activity

Go to your fridge, your garden (or even your bin or a school bag). What is lurking in the vegetable crisper, or in the containers at the back of the fridge? What is in your garden under a rock? Look for something rotten. Smell it.



How does that make you feel? Disgusting? Gross, icky, yuck? Get it away from me!

Now find something good to eat, like a crunchy fresh apple, or a soft ripe banana, or a fresh glass of milk. How much better is it? It is so much better when it doesn't make your stomach turn over.

Read the Bible passage

Galatians 5:19-26

Discussion:

Jesus does the impossible. He takes something that is rotten, and makes it fresh. Remember the rotten thing you smelled? Imagine if you could make it fresh and good to eat? Sounds crazy – but that's what the Bible says Jesus does with us. He loved us so much that he wanted to make us new and fresh. He died to make this happen.

In Galatians it says that Jesus lives in us. When we believe in Jesus, His spirit lives within us. Like a friend that is always there. Helping us to bear the good fruit of Spirit in our lives, not the rotten fruit of sin.

Prayer idea

Thank God for sending his son Jesus to die to help us become new and fresh. Pray that we can show God's love through our actions and words this week.