



THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

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We flip the pages of our calendar quickly. The months come and go, sometimes with such speed that we blink and do not realize how much time has passed. Each new year brings with it a season of reflection: Are our lives changing to satisfy the will of God? Are we growing our faith and producing fruit from our time spent in His word? Are we indeed living a new life in Christ as a people transformed by the gospel? In this new year, may we take time to draw near to God and “*be saved from this perverse generation*” as Paul exhorts in **Acts 2:40**.



Jesus left heaven to live as a man in the flesh and to die a cruel death on the cross. His suffering was on behalf of our sins, although He Himself remained sinless. Does this realization not produce in our hearts the godly sorrow that leads to repentance (**2 Corinthians 7:10**)? Through the power of His blood, Jesus can cleanse us from our sinful ways (**1 John 1:7**), and He offers us an inheritance in the eternal kingdom. Praise God for this opportunity: we must not let it slip away!

Some of us may still be wandering in the wilderness, far from the fold of God’s embrace. How long shall we grieve the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 4:30**)? The Son of Man came “*to seek and to save that which was lost*” (**Luke 19:10**). Do we realize that Jesus was referring to each one of us? If we have learned this truth, let us waste not a minute longer in spurning the invitation of rebirth to a new life (**John 3:5**).

Let Jesus be both Lord and Savior! This understanding means a genuine

change of life whereby Paul encourages us to “*put off...the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*” (**Ephesians 4:22-24**).

Upon making these changes, God will provide us “*a new heart and a new spirit*” (**Ezekiel 18:31**). In baptism, we die to sin, become buried with Christ, and are raised up as a new creation with a new life (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). Coming out of the water, we stand ready to live up to our commitment to the will of God (**Romans 6:3-5**). This new life in Christ prepares us for an eternity with Him as we put our old ways behind us. The slate is wiped clean, and we are invigorated to walk in the light. No longer do we place ourselves on the throne of the heart: it is now King Jesus who sits there to rule.

What does this new life look like? The Apostle Paul writes in **Colossians 3:9-10**, “*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him... .*” With these differences, the people around us will certainly notice we are a “new” creation!

Once we are living for Christ, there is no longer condemnation (**Romans 8:1**). We will have new strength (**Isaiah 40:31**; **Philippians 4:13**), new joy (**Philippians 4:4**), new family (**Ephesians 3:15**), new hope (**Ephesians 4:4**), and a new inheritance (**Ephesians 1:14, 18**). May this be the year in which we give ourselves completely to the new life in Christ, being changed to walk in His light forevermore!

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“For Christ Sent Me Not
to Baptize...”

JANUARY 2022 NEWSLETTER

A YOUTH NOT WASTED

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Living life in consideration of the end is not usually at the forefront of a young person's mind—in fact, death appears as a dream to those who are just getting started on the journey. Even so, this active foresight is the crux of the Preacher's message in Ecclesiastes. He begins the first chapter with a poem about the cyclical nature of life:



One Generation passes away, and another generation comes...the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. That which has been is what will be...and there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:4, 5, 9).

It seems fitting that the Preacher's epilogue in Ecclesiastes 12 is a return to this pattern, magnified through the lens of a human growing old. It is often said that youth is wasted on the young. One arrives at the end of his life only to wonder where the years went. While we are not promised tomorrow, the average life expectancy for humans in the United States is 79 years.

This time, however, is but a breath when compared to eternity; yet God expects us to live out our days with joyful purpose. The Preacher writes:

If a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many...Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you...Walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes... (Ecclesiastes 11:8-9).

Just as an earthly father would desire his son to find joy in a gift given, so does our heavenly Father seek for us to walk through life with full hearts. In **Deuteronomy 28:47**, the Israelites are given over to their enemies because they *“did not serve the Lord with joy and gladness of heart.”*

Likewise, the New Testament teaches that we are to *“rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks...”* (**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**). Joy is really a divine imperative for the Christian. Living for Christ falls apart when we fail to recognize God's numerous blessings.

Learning to walk with joy in our youth starts with savoring the small stuff: the sunrise of a new day, the smile of a passerby, an opportunity to do good. When the Preacher writes of this goal to enjoy life in **Ecclesiastes 11:9**, he also cautions us to remember who we are. We will be judged on the whole of our lives—including areas in which joy may have been found where it should not. Such a realization surely stimulates us to learn to find real pleasure in the things that please the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 describes the unmaking of man in a three-part illustration. The Preacher begins with an admonition to *“remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come...”* (**Ecclesiastes 12:1**). It is interesting that he uses this specific title for the Father since the first illustration in verse 2 recalls the scene of creation in **Genesis 1**.

Aging brings the passing away of old friends, the fading of the lights in our senses, and the recurring storms of aches and pains that, in younger years, would pass by like an afternoon rain shower. Recovery is a longer road without the elastic resiliency of youth.

Verses 3-5 compare the aging body to a home. The arms and hands are no longer able to secure and defend. The legs become unreliable for support. The teeth cannot chew as they once did. Things that once were a part of regular life now become threats and unknowns as *“man goes to his eternal home”* (**Ecclesiastes 12:5**).

Finally, verses 6-8 paint a difficult picture of life as it shatters. We cannot know when this gift of borrowed time will be marked for return; but we do know it will happen to all of us, for *“the dust will return to the earth as it was”* (**Ecclesiastes 12:7**).

These images of growing old are harrowing, but they provide a fitting end to a book written primarily to those who are younger in years. We must remember our Creator before these challenges come upon us.

Every day, we are building that house as described in verses 3-5. Will the walls be lined with photographs of warm memories, or will the deathbed pillow be cold with regret? We must let the future actively shape our present and acknowledge that Christ alone can make our lives truly beautiful. Using our years to serve Him will give us the peace we desire in the end along with a home where the soul never dies.



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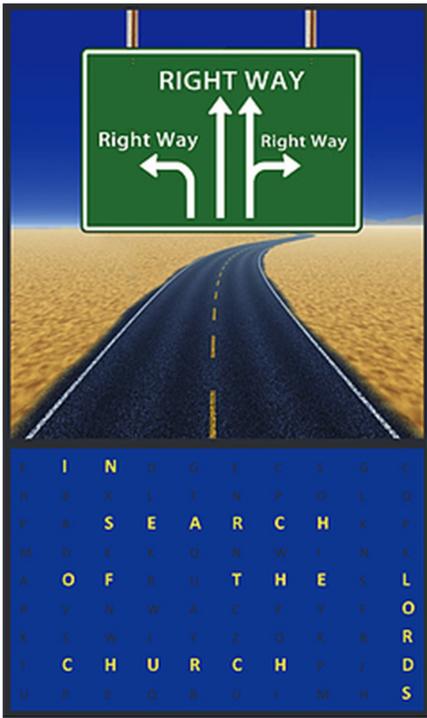
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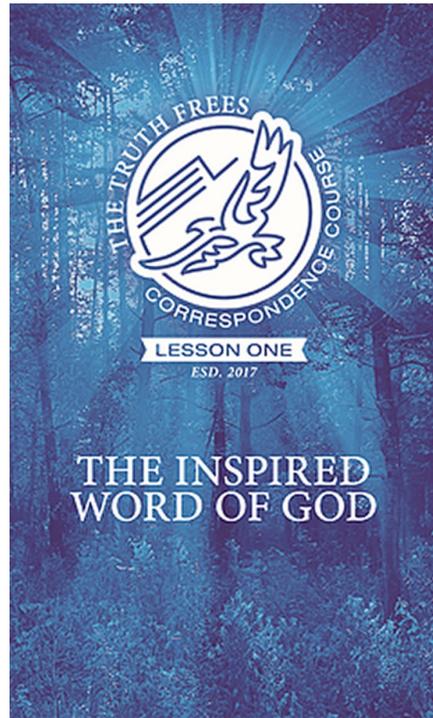
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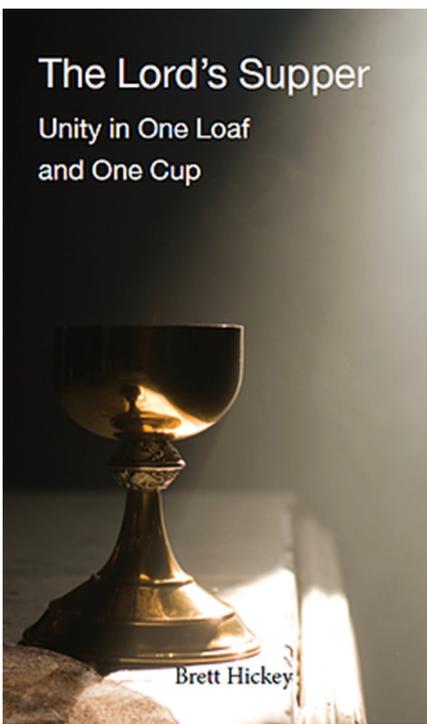
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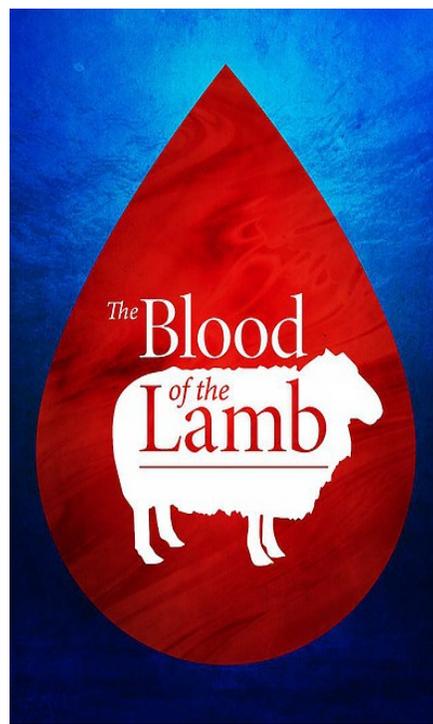
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