

SESSION 3

▶ God Speaks Through His Holy Spirit

In Focus:

The Holy Spirit guides us in knowing God's will.

LOOK AT OUR WORLD

It can be easy to let our feelings or emotions lead us. *It just feels right.* We know we cannot always trust our feelings. They are routinely subjective at best and biased at worst. Yet we might ask if there are times when that “inner voice” is right. Can God’s Holy Spirit move within us to reform our conscience and reorient the course of our thoughts and desires? Yes! The Holy Spirit works within us to discern God’s voice from other voices competing for our attention.

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as our Helper and Comforter: “The Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengthen-er, Standby), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will help you remember everything that I have told you” (John 14:26, AMP¹). God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit. He opens our understanding to the realities of God revealed in the Bible and guides us in an accurate response.



► **How can you tell when you’ve heard God’s voice?**

We can't comprehend His will by our own power or reasoning.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8

⁶ We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

⁷ On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age knew this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Our society is characterized by a mentality that insists on entertainment and resists critical thinking and hard-fought personal growth. We are a culture addicted to amusement. The word *amuse* is fitting. To *muse* about something is to consider it thoughtfully. When the prefix *α-* is added to a word it negates or modifies its meaning. So *amuse* quite literally means that we are engaged in activities or pursuits that are decidedly not being thoughtfully considered.

The amount of time we spend on amusements is a serious issue for our population in general, threatening to stifle people's growth. This threat is a crisis within church communities. God intends for us to enjoy spiritual maturity as we grow in Him, but faced with a craving for entertainment and amusement, we may never get out of spiritual kindergarten! The apostle Paul impressed on us God's plan to cause all Christians to move toward maturity through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This spiritual reality is at cross-purposes with the culture in which we live.

Why is this perilous? Because we are incapable of comprehending God's will by the agency of our own power of reasoning; it is a spiritual impossibility. God's wisdom is the consequence of God's intervention in our lives to give us understanding (v. 7). It is the Spirit of God Who takes the Word of God and opens it to our understanding.

Paul used "wisdom" in both a bad and a good sense. What is the bad sense? The rulers of the world and their wisdom are rendered completely ineffective (v. 6). Their powers and wisdom may be celebrated by the masses, but they are made null and void by God. This is mere human cleverness. These rulers are skilled in their marshaling of human arguments, and they use their skills to convince their hearers. It was the lament of the psalmist:

“They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues strut across the earth. Therefore his people turn to them and drink in their overflowing words” (Ps. 73:9-10).

How did Paul use “wisdom” in a good sense? While we are incapable of understanding God’s will by ourselves, God has revealed His wisdom, His will, and His ways to His people (v. 7). This is the unique and privileged possession of God’s people, and it is an absolute mystery to everyone else. At the root of this wisdom is God’s plan for redeeming the world through our crucified Christ.

I remember when each of our children entered kindergarten. Their careers as students had begun. Soon they would master basic reading, writing, and math competencies. With each successive year, they progressed through school grades until they graduated from high school and moved on to university. With the movement from one grade to the next came corresponding growth in their capacities. My thrill at their start would have diminished had they refused to progress. It would have been troubling if our children were able to move up a grade, yet they chose to remain where they were. Those elementary activity centers that were so enjoyable and informative for a 6-year-old would be inappropriate for a 16-year-old. Growth is assumed. Maturity is expected. As with schooling so it is with our spiritual lives. We are not meant to remain in spiritual kindergarten! We are meant to progress. And the work of the Holy Spirit is to move us along in our spiritual formation.

There is such a thing as Christian wisdom. We live at a moment of grave importance and enormous opportunity. The church does not need to feel threatened, insecure, or frightened. We are the people who humbly gather each week to worship the God of all true wisdom. As we worship Him, we are reoriented to Him. As we are reoriented to Him, we grow in Him. Far more than being the recipients of spiritual facts, we are people who have been shown the meaning of profound spiritual realities. How could we be content to perpetually stay at an elementary stage when we should be progressing toward maturity, strenuously thinking about the things of God?

► ***What are some examples of the wisdom of this age?***

► ***What do you find mysterious about God's wisdom?***

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The Holy Spirit reveals the mind of God.

1 Corinthians 2:9-11

⁹ But as it is written,

What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived—God has prepared these things for those who love him.

¹⁰ Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

As human beings, we are routinely confronted with the limits of our abilities. It is tempting to believe the cliché, “You can do anything you set your mind to.” But sooner rather than later, we are reminded that there are, in fact, boundaries we are unable to breach. For all our medical and technological advances, we are still confronted by incurable illnesses and unresolvable dilemmas. We are both marvelous creations and frail creatures. In our frail human condition, our chief limitation is our inability to comprehend the mind of God and His ways. After millennia of human history, we have

made no headway whatsoever in this regard. And we are assured by the apostle Paul that this limitation will not improve. But there is good news! What we are incapable of doing for ourselves, God will do for us.

Paul left no doubt: there is absolutely no method of comprehension available to us—not our eyes, ears, or understanding—that can give us the slightest idea of the wonderful things that God has prepared exclusively for those who love Him (v. 9). His point was that our natural eyes, ears, and heart lack the capacity to discover and comprehend the wisdom of God. We are entirely dependent on God to work out His plan that He has prepared for us. We can read the Bible, but it is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to see its truth. The Holy Spirit will show us wonderful spiritual realities from God's Word. He will guard us from error, never telling us anything that is contrary to Scripture. He will draw us near to the heart of God.

**God has
prepared
these things
for those
who love him.**

God is not haphazard. When He speaks it will be in a way that you can understand, and it will be in a way that you also know how you are expected to respond. God's people know what they know because God has been pleased to reveal it to them, not because they possess any skill or wisdom of their own of which they should be proud. It is a mystery accomplished by the Holy Spirit Himself!

The Holy Spirit penetrates into all things. Nothing is beyond His knowledge. The Holy Spirit knows "the depths of God" (v. 10). Put another way, the only person capable of telling us about God is the very Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has broken into our closed minds; He has invaded our confined thoughts and shown us God. The Holy Spirit is the beautiful agent of the Trinity, transmitting and communicating to us. What an inheritance we have! This is what Jesus promised: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come" (John 16:13).

It can be said that all our discoveries are not what we have figured out for ourselves but what has been told to us. This certainly does not free us from the responsibility of exerting human effort into the quest, but it clarifies where the discoveries originate: they originate in God. Once God has quickened our minds and hearts, we then strive to understand more, and as we strive, God is gracious to tell us more, and we are urged forward in our responses. In this life,

there is no end to this dynamic, because the riches of God are deep, profound, and unsearchable.

How do we fathom the wonder of this great grace? There can be no other response but our worship and obedience. In the words of Isaac Watts's centuries-old hymn,

Lord, I have made Thy word my choice,
My lasting heritage;
There shall my noblest powers rejoice,
My warmest thoughts engage.

I'll read the histories of Thy love,
And keep Thy laws in sight,
While through the promises I rove,
With ever fresh delight.

'Tis a broad land, of wealth unknown,
Where springs of life arise,
Seeds of immortal bliss are sown,
And hidden glory lies.

► ***What do you think God has prepared for you that you can hardly imagine?***

► ***When has the Holy Spirit revealed a truth to you at just the right time?***

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ENGAGE

When the Counselor Comes

As you read the words of Jesus below, underline ways God speaks through His Holy Spirit. Then circle how you most need to hear God speak at this point in your life.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

John 14:26

It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

John 16:7b-8

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

John 16:13-14

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Write a short prayer welcoming the Holy Spirit's presence into your day. Invite His renewing touch as He works to transform you through your study of His Word. Thank the Spirit for being your Comforter and for His power and transformation in your life.

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to help us apply Scripture to our lives.

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

¹² Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. ¹³ We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. ¹⁴ But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. ¹⁵ The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. ¹⁶ For who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

We do not discover God's truth; we only receive it. And the Bible is the vehicle used by the Holy Spirit to make God's revelation plain to us. We are perpetually reliant on the Holy Spirit to help us apply God's Word to our lives. In contrast to the surrounding world, Christians who are guided by the Holy Spirit draw discerning conclusions about spiritual realities. They are enabled to receive, to understand, and to convey the true wisdom that comes from God.



I was not raised around tornado sirens. It was not until I moved to Texas as a young man that I heard their clarion call for the first time. In the early hours of a stormy spring morning, a siren near my housing unit was activated. The eerie drone of that air raid siren immediately broke my slumber; I was wide awake. My heart was racing. I was ready for action. Whatever plans I had for the day were irrevocably altered in that instant. Whatever I had been dreaming about dissipated. My thoughts became consumed

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by what adjustments were imminently incumbent on me to ensure my safety. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul was sounding a spiritual clarion call akin to an air raid siren. He meant to wake us up. He did not expect us to soon return to slumber.

In each generation, Paul's concern needs to be resounded throughout the church. If it is not kept current and compelling, then we will quickly become disoriented to the ways of God. Rather than recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit as the source of our special status in contrast to the world, we may mistakenly assume His work gives us special status in comparison with one another within the church. We will mistakenly use knowledge as a means to impress each other (spiritual pride), rather than as an impetus to join Christ in His mission to a lost, broken, hurting, and alienated world (spiritual mission). We will stray from an obedient, humble posture and assume a presumptuous, arrogant posture with God and others.

If we have any understanding, any insight, any spiritual victory, it is only because of the gracious generosity of the Holy Spirit. The hallmark of His work is that we are radically distinct from the "wisdom of this age" in our fundamental convictions, values, and worldview (v. 6). We are humbled by every glimpse offered to us by God into His profound mystery of redemption through our crucified Christ.

The person outside of Christ has no understanding of life beyond the physical. To the person who has elevated their social image above all else, secret acts of service are meaningless. To the

person who has elevated sexual attractiveness and behaviors above all else, modesty and chastity are meaningless. To the person who has elevated money and fame above all else, charity and generosity are meaningless. To the person who has elevated momentary pleasures above all else, the eternal things of God are meaningless. For this person there is no capacity to understand the mysteries of God. The things of God look like mere foolishness to them. Tragically, the more we become enamored with the world, the more we will look like it and the less we will look like Christ.

We are desperate to have the Holy Spirit safeguard in us the mind of Christ. That is our antidote against the infectious blindness of the world. It is our gateway into the deep things of God. When the Holy Spirit awakens us to the things of God, it is a simultaneous invitation to join Him in His activity. Our eyes are opened in order for us to make spiritual progress. We celebrate with Habakkuk: "The Lord GOD is my strength [my source of courage, my invincible army]; He has made my feet [steady and sure] like hinds' feet And makes me walk [forward with spiritual confidence] on my high places [of challenge and responsibility]" (Hab. 3:19, AMP¹).

► **How would you describe the spirit of the world?**

► **How would you describe having the mind of Christ?**

LIVE IT OUT

As you read Scripture, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and apply what you are reading. Make Psalm 119:18 part of your prayer: “Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.” Choose one of the following applications:

VIEW OF GOD

Look over your checkbook and your calendar. Does your current sequence of choices reflect the world’s wisdom or God’s wisdom?

VIEW OF SELF

When the Holy Spirit gives you understanding through God’s Word, do you allow Him to guide your application, or do you rush off on your own? Write down some specific things He is calling you to.

VIEW OF OTHERS

What can you share with others about God’s activity in your life and what He may want to do in their lives? Schedule a coffee or lunch with someone God has placed on your heart this week and share what you’ve learned.

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REMEMBER

“But as it is written, What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived—God has prepared these things for those who love him.”
1 Corinthians 2:9

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Life in Christ

by Emily Wickham

People stood scattered on the sidewalk as snowflakes drifted down. I sought to minister to those who arrived to end their pregnancies. Purposefully, I opened my mouth to the God of life while the snow kept falling like teardrops from heaven.

What could I pray? What would make a difference? God led me by His Spirit. He saw everything. He understood the desperate situations many of the women faced. He knew every heart. It wasn't my place to judge because I possessed enough sin of my own. My purpose rested in conveying love and truth on behalf of my Savior. I don't remember my prayer, but I trust God heard and answered according to His will.

Sometimes in life, circumstances stop me cold. I stand perplexed like someone who's lost her way, and my day outside that clinic granted such an experience.

Cleansing Water

Scripture details another time death pervaded a place, and in that instance, it affected the entire world. Violence and evil filled the earth, causing God to grieve over His creation. He decided to eradicate all humankind—everyone except Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their three daughters-in-law. Complete destruction loomed. “Noah, however, found favor with the LORD” (Gen. 6:8).

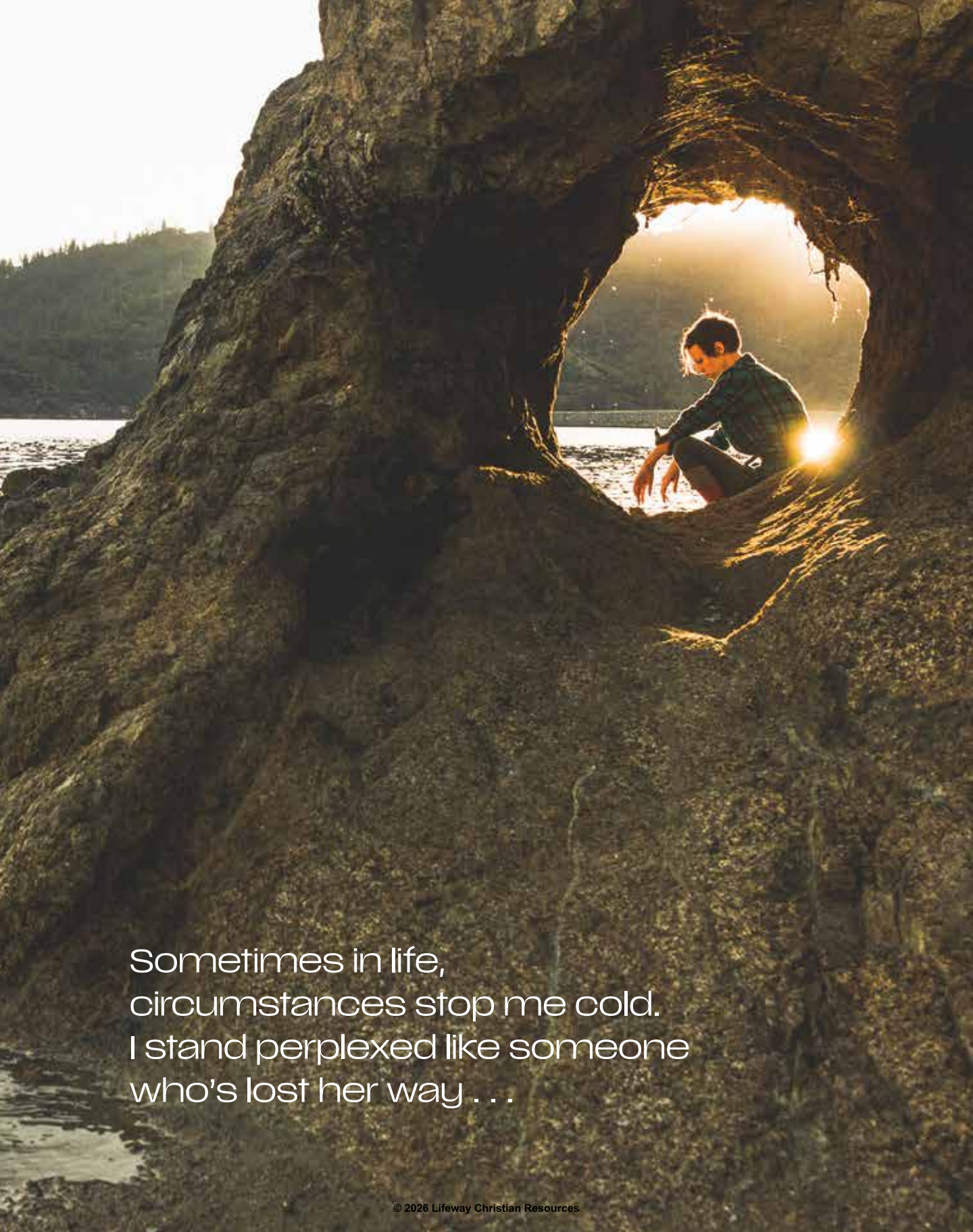
God commanded Noah to build an ark, furnishing him with dimensions and specific instructions. This man, who

“walked with God” (Gen. 6:9), obeyed. He constructed the enormous boat over numerous years, although people probably considered Noah insane as he labored on that vessel. Taunts and jeers likely rang in his ears at night. Still, he trusted God. He knew God, whose great love compelled Him to provide a way of escape from impending death for Noah and his family.

Finally, boarding day arrived. God filled the ark with Noah and his family plus all kinds of animals. “Seven days later the floodwaters came on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the sources of the vast watery depths burst open, the floodgates of the sky were opened” (Gen. 7:10-11). Noah and the others remained safe while water gushed from above and below.

The flood ruined everything, yet Noah and his loved ones survived as rain pounded down for forty days and nights, muting the sounds of terrified people trapped outside. Death surrounded the ark and its occupants—eight people God mercifully saved from the waters of death. And over a year later, the Father placed this family on dry ground where life blossomed again. We live today as heirs of their existence.”

Despite the Lord's preservation of humanity through Noah, sin still soiled every man, woman, and child. So at the most pivotal time in history, God the Father



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sent His only, beloved Son to deal with death's claim upon each one of us. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Jesus died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. All who believe in the Lord Jesus are saved from sin's penalty, washed clean by Christ's precious blood.

Jesus died so we can live, and life in Him is marked by at least five characteristics.

Life in Christ is new.

How many times do we regret sins we've committed? Jesus' death and resurrection enable God to forgive us justly. He doesn't overlook our sin, because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for it with His redeeming blood. May we never forget the wonder of this truth.

And we don't remain who we used to be. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). The moment we trust in Christ for salvation, we enter "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) and embark on our own sanctification journey—the process of becoming holy like Jesus. We are new in Christ, and we're being renewed day by day. "Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16).

Life in Christ is eternal.

John 11:25-26 contain the Lord's words to Martha after the death of her brother, Lazarus. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone

who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" In other words, physical death isn't the end for those who place their trust in Jesus. We'll exist forever, but more importantly, we'll know God intimately.

John 17:3, part of Jesus's prayer, clearly expresses this truth: "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ." Christians aren't waiting for eternal life to begin; knowing God and enjoying Him starts at the moment of salvation.

Life in Christ is abundant.

When we enter a personal relationship with God through faith in Christ, we don't inherit a boring, restrictive existence. Rather, the Lord supplies abundant life, enabling us to live as He originally intended—in cherished communion with Him. Though the enemy of our souls seeks to prevent and distract us from this experience, Jesus said, "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10).

Life in Christ cannot be stolen, snuffed out, or obliterated, despite the devil's efforts. We might undergo missed opportunities to fellowship with God and draw closer to Him, but the abundance Jesus came to give holds true. It encompasses quality and quantity, surpassing our expectations and outlasting time. How's that for a bit of adventure and excitement?

Life in Christ is satisfying.

One of Jesus's conversations stands out primarily because He spoke to a Samaritan woman, an improper action on two counts

according to standards of His day. However, the most significant aspect of their exchange involves Jesus's promise to her. He said, "But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life" (John 4:14).



The woman was astounded and eagerly desired this "water," a symbol of the Holy Spirit who indwells every Christian. Because we receive the Spirit at the moment of salvation, we spend the rest of our lives being nourished and satisfied by God's presence within. Spiritual hunger or thirst cannot overtake or undo us, for the Lord Himself promised, "I will never leave you or abandon you" (Heb. 13:5).

Life in Christ is fruitful.

God constantly thinks of others, and He passes this thoughtfulness on to His children. When we become a new creation, enjoy intimacy with the Lord, partake of

spiritual abundance, and find satisfaction in Christ, we cannot help but share the good news. This might look like communicating the gospel message to an unbelieving friend or acquaintance, discipling others in their relationship with God, praying on behalf of those in need, or serving the Lord in faith. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me" (John 15:5). That is the absolute truth. Christ is our life, and life in Christ bears fruit.

Life begins when we receive Christ as our Savior, and it continues into the dead places we carry. We might think aspects of our lives are hopeless or impossible—dead—but we must remember Jesus gives us a new, eternal, abundant, satisfying, and fruitful life. As we follow Him, He exposes and forgives our unresolved sin patterns, heals our wounds, helps us deal rightly with broken relationships, and breathes into us on a daily basis. "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The Lord accomplishes all this and more for our sakes; He conquered death to give life.

Just as water rushed over the earth in Noah's day, Jesus's precious blood covers our sin, producing life in dead places.

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