

ELYSE M.
FITZPATRICK

FOUND

IN

HIM

THE JOY *of the* INCARNATION *and*
OUR UNION *with* CHRIST

“Busy Christians in an iPhone age can look at Christ as though he were the battery charger and we are the smartphone. We ‘plug into’ Jesus during a quiet time, then go out and live on that energy until our spiritual batteries run dry—then it’s back to the next quiet time, conference, or retreat. But this is not a metaphor the Bible invites us to use when it speaks of our union in Christ. He is the vine; we are the branches. In her newest and perhaps most important work, my friend Elyse Fitzpatrick describes this beautiful union we have with our Savior and the joys of drawing from the Vine. I highly recommend this exceptional book!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Founder and CEO, Joni and Friends International
Disability Center

“Every temptation to sin is, at its root, a temptation to disbelieve the gospel. This is why Elyse’s book is so important. Our failure to lay aside the sin that so easily enslaves us is the direct result of our refusal to believe in the rich provisional resources that are already ours in Christ—we’re not believing that by virtue of our Spirit-wrought union with Christ, everything we need and long for we already possess. Elyse shows that Jesus sweepingly gained (and sweetly gives) all that we could possibly ask for or imagine. If the message of this book were understood and embraced, we would see a new Reformation.”

Tullian Tchividjian, Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Florida;
author, *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World*

“*Found in Him* reveals the God-designed remedy for our impoverished hearts—the work of Christ for, in, and through us. While many heavy-laden, conscience-stricken believers struggle to bear up under the weight of their spiritual ‘to-do’ lists, Elyse awakens our hearts and minds to what Jesus has already done and calls us to find rest in him.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss, author; radio host, *Revive Our Hearts*

“Fasten your seatbelt and get ready for a theological thrill ride. I’m not talking about spiritual entertainment—you best look elsewhere for that. But if you are looking to understand one of the most profound and moving mysteries of the Christian life—as Elyse puts it, ‘the soul-consoling, heart-transforming, zeal-engendering’ of Christ’s incarnation and union with us—well, you’ve found the book you absolutely need to read.”

Mark Galli, editor, *Christianity Today*

“If Elyse Fitzpatrick is right, the Bible (finally) is not about us at all! It is about the God who has acted to save those who *don’t* and *can’t* ‘become better,’ and that Christianity is *not* (finally) about ‘morals’ at all. The Bible’s story is a story about God’s love for *immorals* like you and me. It is about Christ, who he is and what he did for us—once and for all and at a particular time and place in normal history.”

Rod Rosenblatt, Professor of Theology, Concordia University, Irvine, CA

“When the great theologian John Murray famously wrote, ‘Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation,’ I wonder how I could have missed the point for so many years. Yet, as I simply consider the focus of Christ and the apostles on being ‘in him,’ I have grown to recognize the wisdom of Murray’s words and now, with Elyse Fitzpatrick’s book, I also cherish the dearness of them. She writes of the deep truths of our union with God, freshly unfolding biblical passages that describe his incarnation, and she writes with sensitivity of the significance of the continuing intimacy we have with the Creator who walked among us. Here is the infinite made intimate to strengthen our hearts.”

Bryan Chapell, President Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary

“It does not matter what is against you if you believe that Jesus is with you. That is the timeless message of this timely book.”

Mark Driscoll, Founding and Preaching Pastor, Mars Hill Church, Seattle,
Washington; Founder, Resurgence; Co-founder, Acts 29; New York Times
#1 best-selling author

“It is all about Jesus. It is about his glory, his name, his fame, his sacrifice, his sufficiency. He is enough. My friend in ministry, Elyse Fitzpatrick, captures those truths about Jesus in this compelling volume. May it increase your delight in and desire for the Lord.”

James MacDonald, Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel; author, *Vertical Church*

“Over the years, I have been challenged by Elyse’s profound and practical approach to biblical issues that concern women. Last year when I heard her share a snippet of her writing on the incarnation, I was hungry for more—and I wasn’t disappointed! Pondering the incarnation, in my moments of loneliness and brokenness, has been the strong medicine I need to soothe and heal my heart, and I trust it will be yours as well.”

Cathe Laurie, Director of Women’s Ministry, Harvest Christian Fellowship

“*Found in Him* is a timely paean to the timeless good news of Christ’s incarnation and our union with him. As with everything Elyse writes, it brims with humility and imagination, and the focus on grace is sharp and undeviating. She never flinches from honesty about who we are, which only makes the ‘comfort and joy’ of what Jesus has done on our behalf that much greater. Would that more of us had her courage (and good humor)!”

David Zahl, Editor, *The Mockingbird Blog*

“This book is a celebration of the person and work of Jesus. Elyse wisely and winsomely shows us the deep wonders of what it means to be found in Jesus. Her theological maturity enables her to write with profound simplicity. This is a book to be savored. Read it slowly, and stop often to worship the one who found you and made you his own. Then read it again.”

Susan Hunt, former Director of Women’s Ministries for the PCA;
author, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church*

“This new book by Elyse warms my heart. She beautifully elaborates on Christ and who he is and what he has accomplished for us. In the later half of *Found in Him*, she shows us how to apply and live out this Good News. Expect your life to change.”

Charles Morris, Speaker; President, HAVEN Today

“It’s hard for me to capture how thankful I am for this book. As Elyse is so skilled at doing, she has taken the doctrine of our union with Christ, which sits and collects dust on the shelves of most Christians’ theology and has little impact on their living, and displayed for us the beauty of its transformative power. When you don’t understand the essential provisions that have been made for you in your union with Christ, you sadly spend your life shopping for what is already yours in him. I will recommend and give away this book again and again and will celebrate with new enthusiasm that I have been found in him!”

Paul David Tripp, President, Paul Tripp Ministries; author, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*

“Resist the temptation to think that a book on the incarnation of Christ and our union with him couldn’t help but be dull, dry, and doctrinally abstract. Elyse Fitzpatrick couldn’t be dull if she tried! This is a rich, incisive, thoroughly scriptural, and heart-warming journey into the gospel of who Jesus is and what he has done to unite us to himself. Elyse’s portrait of Jesus and our life in him will do more than challenge and inform; it will awaken awe at the depths of God’s grace and stir adoration for the one who loved you and gave himself for you. Read and rejoice! I did.”

Sam Storms, Senior Pastor, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City

“As Elyse says in this book, there is truly a feast to be found in understanding and meditating on the truth of our union with Christ. This doctrine has transformed how I understand myself and empowered me in healthy relationships with others. Elyse’s *Found in Him* is a beautiful exploration of these truths, and I am excited that this resource is now available.”

Wendy Horger Alsup, mother; author, *Practical Theology for Women and The Gospel-Centered Woman*

“*Found In Him* offers a deep but nevertheless eminently practical look at the doctrine of union with Christ. Whether in his union with humanity by virtue of the incarnation or through indwelling the believer by the Holy Spirit, all Christians should know Christ, the one to whom they are united. This book is an able guide to understanding these glorious truths.”

J. V. Fesko, Academic Dean, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology,
Westminster Seminary California

“One of my favorite experiences was eating at a chocolate buffet at the Cailler chocolate factory, in Broc, Switzerland. Reading Elyse’s new book, *Found in Him*, reminded me of that day. Our sister has spread the table with the richest of gospel fare and has invited us to behold, feast, and savor every good thing we have in Christ. This is the finest meditation I have ever read on the radical implications of the incarnation of Christ and our ‘this-changes-everything’ union with him. Highly accessible, theologically sound, and eminently encouraging, Elyse has once again clearly demonstrated that there’s nothing more *than* the gospel, there’s just more *of* the gospel.”

Scotty Smith, Teacher in Residence, West End Community Church, Nashville

“In her treatment of the incarnation of Christ and our union with him, Elyse Fitzpatrick has given us an insightful and compelling presentation of these insufficiently celebrated truths. And she sets them forth not just as truths but as realities that profoundly touch our daily lives—truths which are, in fact, meant to touch our lives deeply and powerfully. To paraphrase Elyse, ‘O how impoverished our souls will be if we neglect these sweet doctrines.’ I have often told students to read books that make you want to read your Bible more. Here is such a book. I turned often to my Bible, with great joy, while reading *Found in Him*.”

Mike Bullmore, Senior Pastor, Crossway Community Church, Bristol, Wisconsin

“Elyse Fitzpatrick’s writings are always saturated with gospel grace, understanding, and wisdom, and *Found in Him* is no different. With clarity and warmth Elyse meditates on how God answers our isolation and enters into our suffering through the incarnation of Jesus. In Christ we are not alone, and we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. I am thankful for Elyse’s ministry and for this book.”

Justin S. Holcomb, Episcopal priest; Adjunct Professor of Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando; author, *On the Grace of God*

“Many of us, if we are honest, have an image of God as the one who is far above us and far away from us. Few of us know our Trinitarian God as so close to us that he is in us and we are in him. My friend Elyse Fitzpatrick takes the doctrine of the incarnation and teaches us that we are not alone—God is with us! Elyse then takes the doctrine of our union with Christ and shows us the soul-altering significance of our connection and communion with God in Christ. *Found in Him* is not just theology come alive, it is theology for life—for your life and mine.”

Robert W. Kellemen, Executive Director, The Biblical Counseling Coalition; author, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church*

Other Crossway books by Elyse Fitzpatrick:

Comforts from Romans: Celebrating the Gospel One Day at a Time, 2013

Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus (with Jessica Thompson), 2011

Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ (with Dennis E. Johnson), 2009

Comforts from the Cross: Celebrating the Gospel One Day at a Time, 2009

Because He Loves Me: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life, 2008

Found in Him: The Joy of the Incarnation and Our Union with Christ

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Introduction

When I was a child, I had a recurring nightmare. I would dream that I was standing on a darkened stage, completely alone. In my dream I wasn't able to move, hide, or even speak. Rooted to the ground in terror, I sensed a threatening presence lurking just out of sight. I was lost, wandering. Somehow, and though I didn't know how then, I knew I was ruined and had ruined something, and that there was nothing I could do to make up for my mistake.

Even now, though I'm in my sixties, I can still feel the isolation and dread that threatened to engulf me on that dark stage. I was completely alone, engulfed with inescapable dread, barely able to breathe. I can't describe how terrifying that felt and still feels to me now when I call it to mind.

If you want to try to psychoanalyze me, I'll admit that I was what today might be called a "latchkey kid," and my nightmare probably expressed that loneliness and my sense that there was something intrinsically wrong with me that wasn't wrong with people who had "normal" families. My dad had left our home fairly early on, and my mom worked hard to try to make ends meet for my brother and me. When I think back on my childhood, "family" isn't a word I would use to describe it. After walking home alone from school every day, I would play by myself (and eat toast) until my mom arrived home from work, usually about 6 p.m. Then we would have some dinner, and I would go play with my dolls by myself or watch TV. My early life wasn't very social. In fact, it really wasn't social at all. I didn't have a lot of friends.

From this, you might conclude that it isn't surprising that I had nightmares about being alone and fatally flawed. That dream was, in some ways, a mirror on a lost and wandering little girl's soul. But I don't think I'm the only one who has ever felt that way. In fact, I think everyone struggles with feelings of alienation and a suspicion that something is very broken at the deepest places in our lives, no matter if we grew up as latchkey kids or in a loving family of nine.

It also seems to me, though, that everyone continues to hope. We hope that someday we'll wake up to discover that we aren't isolated, standing on that darkened stage, awaiting judgment, and that all that dread was just a bad dream after all. We hope that there is something more than this loneliness and isolation, something that will last beyond holiday family dinners and into the night when everyone is gone and we're alone again. On our hope-filled days we are like children waiting to hear some good news—news that will assure us that no matter how alone and ruined we are, someone has loved us, someone has rescued us, and soon we will be truly found.

Right before my twenty-first birthday, the Lord graciously saved me. He saved me from my sin and out of my great need. He saved me from the anger, bitterness, self-deception, and self-hatred that had marred my life up to that point. He saved me from my aloneness, isolation, loneliness, and self-condemnation. And he made me part of his family. I didn't know much about him during those early years, but I knew I finally belonged to someone and that this someone mattered more to me than anything. I knew that I was home. I was family. He had given me faith to believe that I was loved and welcomed, and from that point on, everything began to change.

Although this book isn't about my angst growing up as a lonely child, I want you to know where I'm coming from. I know what loneliness and lostness feel like as a child, and I know what it feels like today. I know that latchkey kids aren't the only ones who ex-

perience loneliness; we can be surrounded with family and friends and still feel completely out of sync, alone, isolated. We can stand in the foyer at church, surrounded by hundreds of other believers, and still think we're on our own, the only ones failing to perform, still trying to fit in.

WE ARE ALONE

Everyone struggles with feelings of alienation and isolation, whether or not we were raised with loads of siblings and very attentive parents. Alienation and aloneness are expressed in many ways. It can be expressed as inadequacy: "I can't do this on my own," or "I never seem to be able to get it right!" (whatever *it* is). It can also be expressed in the lack of being understood: "No one really knows me!" or "Why does everyone always misunderstand me?" Or, of course, it can be expressed as deep loneliness: "I'll never fit in," and "Why can't I make friends like she does?"

Sin has wrought devastation and isolation in all our lives. Our experience of sin, our own and others' against us, has brought separation and alienation to all of us. This separation and alienation originates in our broken relationship with God and flows out from there into broken relationships with one another and even with the created world. No matter how popular we might be, none of us has ever experienced deep unity or authentic union with another. Since the day that our forefather and mother were exiled out of the garden of Eden, we've been lost, trying to get back in, trying to find oneness with each other and the Lord, trying to find communion, our way home. We've been trying to be found. The truth is that without Christ, we are utterly alone, and our attempts to fill our hours with goodies or texting or work or even ministry are simply futile attempts to assure ourselves that things aren't so bad after all. But at the end of the day, in the middle of the night, and at the end of our lives, without the love and work of Jesus Christ, the God-man, we are alone and we know it—and it terrifies us. Every one of us is standing on

that darkened stage, condemned, lost and wandering, needing to be found.

THE TRUTH WE ALL NEED

Found in Him has been written because most of us, even though we're Christians, are unaware of the importance of our oneness with Christ (commonly called "union") and his amazing oneness with us (known as the "incarnation"). I suspect that, for most of us, the nearness, or imminence, of Jesus barely enters our consciousness as we face the vicissitudes of daily life on that darkened stage. We neglect the doctrines of incarnation and union to our own deep impoverishment. It's a sad reality that many Christians spend their entire lives wandering around a spiritual wilderness, malnourished, thirsting, and consuming rubbish because they have never feasted on the soul-consoling, heart-transforming, zeal-engendering truth found in the study of the incarnation and union. So I invite you to join with me as we feast on these two often-neglected but beautifully resplendent joys. These joys come directly to us from the one from whom we were estranged, and who alone offers the only antidote to the isolation pandemic we're hoping to escape. He offers us this antidote because he has united in himself both God and man, making one new and completely unique Person, and has united believers with himself, with that Person. We will never know how found, loved, welcomed, and reconciled we are until we see how he has forever taken our nature to himself and has bound us to himself in enduring oneness. God is one with man in Jesus Christ, and we are one with him.

I'll admit up front that we're going to be doing a little theology here. Don't let that frighten you. After all, theology is simply the study of God, and you wouldn't have picked up this book if you weren't interested in knowing more about him. Our study won't consist of obscure propositions or ideas disconnected from daily life. You'll find that these truths will bring life, peace, and joy to your soul. Don't worry—we're all growing in the knowledge of

him, and in the knowledge of the Lord there is great satisfaction (Ps. 107:9).

THE FEAST FOUND IN THE INCARNATION

Here's how we're going to go about our study. The first part of this book, chapters 1–6, will introduce you to the topic of God becoming man, the incarnation. Of course, if you've ever sung a Christmas carol, you're already familiar with the incarnation, but I wonder how much any of us ever think about the events of Bethlehem when we're stuck in traffic or in the hospital or applying for unemployment benefits. Does the fact that the second person of the Trinity became a man so that he could love and save you ever cross your mind? As a woman who believed in the incarnation over forty years ago, I'll admit that I never thought about it much, except at Christmas. I suppose it's the same for most of us. The incarnation is most clearly stated in these precious words from John 1:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:14, 16–18)

What do John's words mean? We'll spend six chapters considering their meaning, but in summary they mean that Jesus Christ "entered into complete solidarity with us in our sinful existence in order to save us, without becoming himself a sinner."¹ We are not alone. He is Immanuel, *God with us* (Matt. 1:23). *God is with us; we are not alone.*

We also learn about the incarnation from Paul in Colossians 2:9: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." A man who lived over two thousand years ago in Israel is also the second person of the Trinity, who had existed from eternity. He is the God-man. How can this be? It is deep mystery, but it's a mystery

we must investigate because the implications of the incarnation cannot be exaggerated. In fact, in the 1500s Martin Chemnitz wrote that when we lose the truth of the incarnation, Jesus “can no longer be our Savior.” He calls the incarnation the “greatest and sweetest consolation”² that we can know.

It’s axiomatic to say that we are alone. We are solitary individuals; we all know that. Not only are we alienated from one another; we are alienated from God. But God has taken action. He became man, becoming one with us so that we would not have to live in deep solitude any longer—and his action opens the door not only to deep communion with him but also with one another.

THE FEAST FOUND IN UNION WITH CHRIST

In the second part of the book, we’ll look into Jesus’s union with us as individuals and corporately as his bride, the church. When I say “union,” I’m referring to the time Jesus taught that he is the vine and that we are to abide in him. I’m also talking about all those places in the New Testament where the apostles, especially John and Paul, use the words “in Christ” or “with Christ.” We’ll spend time looking into those little phrases, because it seems to me that when we read our Bibles and come across them, we’re tempted to simply gloss over them. They seem to us like little needless appendages. Sure, we know they are there, and we know that they must mean something, but, after all, how important can they be?

For example, in the beginning of the book of Ephesians, Paul refers to our union with Christ eleven times (Eph. 1:3–14)! Notice, as you read, the number of times in just two verses our little phrases “in Christ” or “in him” are included:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (vv. 3–4)

I suspect that the little words “in” and “with” are more important than we know, as John Murray contends:

Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. . . . Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.³

A FEAST FOR OUR SOULS

Throughout all ten chapters of this book, I’ll be pressing you to see the ways in which these truths relate to you personally by connecting them to real-life examples. But this won’t primarily be a book of vignettes. No, I won’t waste our time on loads of stories about me, because there is way too much good news to give you, and, after all, my stories, as entertaining as I might think they are, are not what your soul needs.

THE PLEASURE OF GOD

In closing, here’s something more for you to consider: God seems to take great pleasure in union. In fact, God himself is a union of three persons in one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity. Consider the following demonstrations of God’s love of union in the midst of diversity. Flowing out from God’s tri-personal nature we see unity:

In creation. God made man in his image (Gen. 1:26).

In marriage. First instituted in the garden when man had perfect union with his Creator (Gen. 3:8), and the Creator wanted the man to know the joy of union with someone: “They shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

In the incarnation. The Eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).

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In our rebirth. “He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:17).

In the church. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27).

And finally *in our ultimate transformation.* “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49).

Because we are made in God’s image, we are hardwired to love oneness and fear and despise isolation. It’s in our DNA, which is one of the reasons that we’re always hoping to find it in relationships or experiences, why we’re hoping to get off that dark stage. The fact that even unbelievers love being united with others with a common goal is testimony to that. Need an example? Think NFL. Sixty thousand strangers uniting together in one place to cheer their team on to victory in one voice. There’s something more enjoyable about actually being there with others than simply watching it on TV at home alone, isn’t there? It’s the experience of being a part of something bigger than ourselves and being a part of it with others. I’m no fan of the NFL, but I understand the joys of cheering with thousands of other people in unity.

THIS IS HOLY GROUND:

LET US ENTER WITH HUMILITY

The incarnation and Christ’s union with us are fundamentally holy mysteries. If we learn of them at all, it will be because he has made us able to know him, and it is his power (not my study or your diligence) that has carried it out. Without his gracious condescension to reveal himself, we would remain completely alone and in the dark. We need the illuminating grace of Christ, and I have prayed and am praying that the Lord will grant us that light.

We cannot earn knowledge of Christ, we cannot achieve it, or build up to it. We have no capacity or power in ourselves giving

us the ability to have mastery over this fact. In the very act of knowing Christ, *he is the master, we are the mastered.*⁴

So if we learn anything about him or about our place in his life or his life in us, it is because he is Lord and God, and he has given us revelation of himself. Let us then humbly pray together that his light will shine into our isolation and darkness and that he who spoke light into existence will shine into our hearts to give us “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6), our brother, our kinsman-redeemer. We’re not standing on that darkened stage alone any more, nor will we ever again—no, now we’re standing on holy ground, and we are one with him, our elder brother.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.⁵

PART 1

INCARNATION

From Beginning to End It's All about Him

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures
the things concerning himself.*

LUKE 24:27

The story of Jesus, the long-awaited Christ, is what the entire Bible is about. Perhaps I should say that again. The beginning and end of *everything* in the universe and most particularly everything recorded in the Scriptures is Jesus Christ. He declared himself to be the “Alpha and the Omega,” the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). He “is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” In all that is, he is “*preeminent*” (Col. 1:18). He is the sun around whom all beings orbit, whether they are aware of it or not. He is the director, the author, the actor, and the finale of every act that has ever been played out on humanity’s stage.

The man Christ Jesus is the preeminent message of the Bible. Of course there are other messages and secondary peoples and histories, but he’s the point of everything that has been written. He is primary; he outranks everyone and everything in importance, dignity, beauty, wisdom, and honor. And because of who he is and what he has done for our salvation,

INCARNATION

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11)

I suppose that those of you who have been Christians for any length of time are nodding in assent. Yes, of course Jesus is the main character in the Bible! That's obvious, isn't it? Well, yes, it should be obvious. But while many of us would agree that Jesus is key, the all-encompassing message of his preeminence, although assumed, is not usually the message we hear. No, the message we usually hear is something about us and what we're supposed to do to make God happy, or, at least, about how we can avoid making him unhappy and live satisfying lives. But as we'll learn in the chapters to come, the Bible isn't primarily a rulebook, nor is it a self-help manual; it's not about how we become better people so that we can earn blessings by working hard. It's all about Jesus, *God made man*, his life, death, and resurrection. It is about his determination to be in union with us.

The message of the Bible is Jesus Christ, the one truly good human person: who he is and the work he's done for our salvation and his Father's glory. Of course, what he has done does intersect with our lives and change us, but we're not the subject of this story—he is. He is the subject, and all the verbs are about his work. But this story didn't start a mere two thousand years ago in Bethlehem.

THE SON BEFORE THE BABY

Way before the Christmas story was written, the Bible resounded with the message of the Son. In fact, all of the Old Testament writings are about Jesus. Every law, every prophetic utterance, every narrative, every psalm is meant to remind us of him, to force us to look away from ourselves and to look to him for salvation.

Adam's, Abraham's, and Israel's entire experience was designed from the beginning to foreshadow the end [that] . . . Jesus, the beloved Son, would keep the covenant and bear the curse on their behalf and ours.¹

In fact, Jesus himself claimed that he was the subject of all of Israel's history. I know that this might be a new thought for some of you, so here are some passages from the New Testament for your consideration. Notice how Jesus identifies himself as the subject of all of Moses's writings:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; *and it is they that bear witness about me*. . . . If you believed Moses, you would believe me; *for he wrote of me*. (John 5:39, 46)²

Think of that! Jesus said that Moses actually wrote about him! But that's not all he had to say on the topic. After the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples on the road to Emmaus and taught them (and by extension, us) the right way to read and interpret all the Old Testament Scriptures:³

These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, *that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*. (Luke 24:44)

And beginning with *Moses and all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures *the things concerning himself*. (Luke 24:27)

EVEN BEFORE THE AGES BEGAN

Jesus (and the rest of the New Testament writers) made it abundantly clear that all the history contained in the Old Testament was ultimately about him: his person and his work. But even further back, even before Genesis 1 and the first light of creation, he was already involved in our salvation. His preeminence in our salvation didn't start when Adam and Eve were created or even when they

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first sinned. Although Jesus the God-man doesn't actually appear until his physical birth in Bethlehem around two thousand years ago, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, had existed in communion with God the Father and God the Spirit eternally. From before the Word was spoken and the Holy Spirit hovered over the womb of the unformed world (Gen. 1:2), God the Son existed in inexpressible light and endless joy in union and loving fellowship with his Father and the Spirit. The Son, the personal Word, was "with" God and was, in fact, God (John 1:1–2; 1 John 1:1).

There, in time, before time began, the Trinity existed in perfect happiness within his person. He was not lonely; he never needed anything. In himself, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit were absolutely complete, a Trinity existing in perfect harmony and unity. But then, in overflowing love, grace, and mercy, God chose to make a covenant within himself, sometimes called the *pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption.⁴ In it the Son agreed to be sent as a redeemer for a race of men yet to be created, but in order to do so, he would have to become a new sort of person, one in the likeness of his fallen brothers and yet immutably God. He agreed to do this not out of necessity, not because he was forced to or lacked something in himself that only the incarnation would provide, but because of God's "own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus *before the ages began*" (2 Tim. 1:9).

Now, before we look more deeply at what that means, why not take a moment to think a bit more about it? Consider this: before the ages began it was God's plan to come to you, to call you to himself, to save you and make you his own. Though you were lost, he set out to find you and make you one with him. He wasn't shocked or taken by surprise by Adam's fall in Eden. Before the ages began he had already planned for it. He is not shocked or surprised by your weakness or sin. He saw it all before you were ever born and yet purposed to come to you with his grace—not in judgment, but in lavish grace.

Our sin and salvation didn't necessitate a plan B. His purpose

to bring salvation before the ages began is now and always has been the only plan there ever was. Our sin didn't paint him into a corner or leave him scrambling to try to fix the big mess we had made. We were chosen "in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

IN ALL-KNOWING LOVE THE LORD CREATED

In love God made mankind, knowing what it would cost him, knowing all about Bethlehem and Calvary and all our sins before they even existed. In joy he said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). By his Son, the creative Word, he made "all things" (John 1:3), including man, and gave him life by personally breathing into him his first breath. So Adam and Eve were created—perfect creatures in perfect love and harmony with each other and with their creator, the Son, who would visit them for joyous walks in the "cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8).

But this bliss would not last. Soon the couple would know the bitter taste of conflict, disunity, and isolation; they would be sent wandering and weeping away from the garden, and they would know that without a doubt this was their own doing.

The Serpent tempted them by questioning the very love of God for them that was at the heart of their creation.

"If God really loved you he would let you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil," he hissed. "Go ahead; help yourself. That way there won't be any difference between you and him. In fact, you'll be just like him. Take care of yourself. You can do it!"

The Lord had wisely fashioned Adam and Eve in his own image for fellowship with him and with each other, and, oh, the madness of craving something other. Of course, they knew that what they had in communion with their creator and each other was great (even though there were differences), but they were captivated by the thought of how much better life would be if there weren't any differences at all! They didn't want to be creatures any more—they

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wanted to be gods, too! They knew about goodness already, but they didn't know about evil, and they were so curious. Wouldn't it be a good thing for them to know everything there was to know? Didn't they need to help themselves out?

Adam and Eve drank from the poisonous cup of autonomy and independence. They ate and fell. They fell from their blessed communion with the Lord and were banished from the beautiful garden he had created for them. They fell also from blessed union with each other. God's image in them was shattered (though not completely obliterated), and in that shattering every relationship within the race of man would thereafter be marred. On our own, we would never know the "oneness" we all long for. Where once Adam and Eve had been "one flesh," now they were individuals. Where once they had been self-forgetful, now each was "turned in upon himself. . . . Each [knew] that he or she was no longer what he or she ought to be."⁵ They experienced shame. They hid. They tried to cover themselves with fig leaves; they wept in isolation.

Notice that Adam immediately began to refer to himself in the singular "I" rather than as "we" (Gen. 3:10). The deathly individualization of humanity had begun, and with surprising ease Adam deserted his wife while casting aspersions upon the Lord's wisdom for giving her to him in the first place. Adam was utterly alone. He had abandoned his wife. He no longer trusted his God. On her own, Eve was weak and vulnerable. And though we are no longer hiding behind a tree in that garden, the die had been cast for the rest of us. All their children, all of us, will hide from each other and the Lord in isolation, suspicion, and shame, trying to weave together fig leaves to cover our shame.

SEPARATION AND DEATH

Before Adam and his wife left the garden from which they had been banished, God cursed them and told them of the enmity and conflict that would forever plague them. There would be enmity between mankind, animals, and the created earth, between the

wife and her husband. The evening walks with the Son would end (for now). Man was alone, isolated, solitary, lost.

Thankfully, that isn't the end of the story. Although the Lord had spoken a curse of death for disobedience, he also comforted them with good news. Eve would be a mother. Through the woman a child would come who would bruise or crush the Serpent's head (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20). Even in the devastation that their sin had caused, there was still good news: there would be new life, offspring, another Man who would comfort his mother, who would be born from her and who would be uniquely created in God's image. He would walk in the evening with his people and talk with them about the inevitability and blessing of another tree. The enemy would be vanquished. And as a foreshadowing of this new Man's life and death, God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals: living, breathing creatures were slaughtered to cover their nakedness and shame.

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM

In astounding grace, God called a descendant of Adam and Eve, Abraham, out of Ur, a land of idol worshipers. God promised that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3); that is, through Abraham's offspring, namely, Jesus, God would again come to his people, but this time in a way that no one could have foreseen (Gal. 3:16). God's Son would become a man! A miracle birth would occur, and this Promised One would eventually give his life as ransom for the blessing of many, fulfilling God's ancient promise to Abraham (Acts 3:25). Abraham was one of the greatest men in the Old Testament, but his story is not meant to focus us on him or his goodness or his life. Yes, we are to follow in his faith, but Abraham isn't the point of the story. Jesus, the one in whom Abraham believed, is.

Abraham trusted in Jesus! How could that happen? After all, Abraham lived and died thousands of years before Jesus was even born. Jesus knew that he was the ultimate fulfillment of his Fa-

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ther's ancient promise to Abraham. Thousands of years after the promise of blessing had been given to Abraham, Jesus shocked his listeners by declaring that Abraham had seen "his day" and had been gladdened by it. Jesus tells us that Abraham knew him because this man, Jesus, had existed before him. His hearers incredulously asked, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:57–58).⁶

In using the phrase "I am," Jesus was declaring that not only had he existed before his actual physical birth in Bethlehem, but also that he was Yahweh himself. That his hearers understood exactly what he meant is shown by their response to his words: "So they picked up stones to throw at him" (John 8:59). They were infuriated because Jesus was proclaiming that God had been furnished with a body and a soul and that they were looking at God in the flesh! His audacity was too much to bear. His blasphemy had to be silenced.

TWO MIRACLE BIRTHS, TWO BLOODY MOUNTAINS

After many years and numerous trials, the Lord finally granted aged Abraham and his elderly wife, Sarah, a beloved son, Isaac. This miracle son, born to a father who was "as good as dead," and a mother who was "past the age" (Heb. 11:11–12), would ultimately be offered up as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. The wood for the sacrifice was laid on Isaac's back while he and his father made the journey up the mountain with knife and fire (see Genesis 22).

Like Isaac before him, Jesus too would carry the wood for his sacrifice as he walked up Calvary, probably the same mountain that Abraham had walked up before him. And there, like Isaac, Jesus willingly lay down on the wood to die. But although Abraham was willing to offer the son he loved as a sacrifice, there could only be one promised Son offered up by the loving Father, so it is here that the similarities between Mount Moriah and Calvary ended.

Isaac would never know the thrust of his father's knife, but our Lord experienced far more than that—his wrists, ankles and side were pierced for our transgressions (Isa. 53:5). Isaac would never gape in wonder at his father's desertion, but the Son would cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). At the very moment when the Father should have freed Jesus from his captivity, as Abraham had freed Isaac, the Father poured out all his fiery wrath upon him. Jesus was the ram who was "caught in a thicket" (Gen. 22:13) and slaughtered on a mount so that we could go free. He was caught in the thicket of our sin, but this was no accident. He willingly walked into it and became "sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) and a "curse" (Gal. 3:13) for us so that we might be eternally his. The perfect incarnate Son is the only offering who can atone for sin—for Abraham's, Isaac's, and ours. No matter how hard we work, we cannot atone for our sin or make it up to God. Jesus alone is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Now Abraham's experience becomes ours, and we, like him, meet Jehovah-Jireh, the God who provides on the "mount of the LORD" (Gen. 22:14). In Christ, Jehovah-Jireh has provided all we need: a savior, a redeemer, a friend and a husband. We are no longer alone, trying to offer sacrifices that prove our love and fidelity. We are his. We have been found.

JESUS: THE PROPHET GREATER THAN MOSES

God prospered Abraham and his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Jacob grew to become a great family, known by Jacob's new name, Israel. During a time of famine the family went down to Egypt under Jacob's son Joseph's care, and there the family multiplied into a great nation. Soon they were forced into slavery by a ruler who did not "know" Joseph (Ex. 1:8), but God delivered his people out of Egypt through great plagues and wonders by the hand of a deliverer, Moses. Even Moses knew that he wasn't the point of the story, though God used him greatly. He knew that there would be a greater true Deliverer who would come after him and of whom he foretold:

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The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. . . . And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (Deut. 18:15, 18)

Jesus said that he was the greater prophet Moses had spoken of. He was raised up from among his brothers, from the Jews, for all mankind. Jesus fulfilled the words of Moses's prophecy by speaking the words that were given to him by his Father (John 17:8), doing nothing on his own authority but speaking only as the Father had taught him (John 8:28). The apostles, too, recognized that Jesus was the prophet foreshadowed by Moses, the prophet raised up from among his brothers, the prophet to whom the people should listen (Acts 3:22–24; 7:37). As great as Moses was, he was not the deliverer that the people needed.

Because of Israel's stubborn unbelief, they were forced to wander in the wilderness for forty years. But they were never truly alone because the true Deliverer never abandoned them. As they wandered, the Father fed them the bread of heaven. Jesus said that his flesh was that bread (John 6:32–33, 56–58). Even more shockingly, Paul tells us that Jesus was the rock that flowed with water who followed them throughout their wanderings: "They drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and *the Rock was Christ*" (1 Cor. 10:3–4). He is the water that is sent for those who are thirsty (John 7:37), and at his final Passover celebration with his disciples, a celebration that has become the sacrament of Communion for us, Jesus declared that it is his body and blood that we are eating and drinking (Matt. 26:26–28). He has been guiding, sustaining, and feeding his people for eons: throughout all our wanderings, he has remained faithful to nourish and cherish us (Eph. 5:29), even when our wandering is due to our unbelief. Jesus was there with Abraham on Mount Moriah and with the nation of Israel as they thirsted in the wilderness. And he is here with us today. Jesus is the central figure of all of Israel's history.

ROCK OF AGES

God called Moses up onto Mount Sinai and gave him the Law, “written with the finger of God” (Ex. 31:18; certainly another reference to the Son).⁷ The people were to live by that law but, of course, they didn’t. As was Satan’s practice, in the wilderness he tempted them. Would they believe that God would provide? Did he really love them? You know they disbelieved and failed miserably. Having grown tired of waiting for Moses’s return from the mountain, the people “sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play” (Ex. 32:6). Upon his return, Moses threw down the stone tablets of the Law, shattering them in pieces, as a sign of what the people had already done. The Lord declared his purpose to obliterate the nation and spare Moses, but Moses interceded on their behalf, and God relented, inviting Moses back up on Mount Sinai to receive the Law from him a second time. Moses’s intervention is another beautiful type of the Deliverer to come. But Moses isn’t the Savior. No, he needed a deliverer himself.

At this point, Moses made a very bold and loving request. He asked the Lord, “Please show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18). So God allowed Moses to ascend the mountain once again and lovingly placed him in the cleft or fissure of a rock, covering him with his hand so that his glory might pass by him. God enabled Moses to see him without being killed by the sight. Moses was hidden in a broken rock and was given an audible description of God’s character:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (Ex. 34:6–7)

Does the broken rock that protected Moses from God’s glory have a name? Yes, of course. The Son is the rock of ages who was

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cleft for us, in whom we are to hide to be protected from what would be a deadly holiness. How are we protected? By the very hand of God. In fact, we are hidden *in God from God* by the Son's life, death, and resurrection.⁸ We can look upon Jesus, the one in whom the whole fullness of God dwells, and not be killed by the sight. He is the Deliverer. He is the point of the story.

In penning Israel's history, Moses knew that he was writing about something more than himself and his people. He knew that there was a deeper truth he was proclaiming. He was looking forward to another deliverer, to one who didn't need to hide from God. He was looking forward to the rock who would also be a man.

On this side of the incarnation, we can see God's glory face-to-face in the human face of Jesus. We no longer have to worry about being obliterated by his greatness, for he has come to us as Jesus, veiled or cloaked in our flesh, as John writes:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:14, 18)

TRUE SALVATION LIFTED UP

In an evening conversation with Nicodemus the Pharisee, Jesus applied another story from Israel's history to himself and his role of Savior. He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14–15). Nicodemus would certainly have been very well aware of the account of the fiery serpents in the wilderness, God's judgment, and ultimate deliverance of his grumbling people through the brazen serpent (Num. 21:4–9). And undoubtedly, Nicodemus would have turned this piece of history into a morality tale about the ills of complaining—which is the way we all tend to interpret Scripture. Instead of interpreting it in that way, though, Jesus made it an illustration about his ultimate plan to atone for sin by being "lifted up" as the brazen serpent in

the wilderness had been. We make this story about us and how we can avoid snakebites. Jesus made it about him and his work.

Nicodemus would never have interpreted the story of the fiery serpents in that way; he would have understood it as God's judgment on grumblers for unbelief and as a warning not to complain. Instead, Jesus used it to turn Nicodemus's trust away from himself through his own ability to avoid complaining and onto his Messiah.

First, he did this by demolishing his confidence in his ability to rightly interpret Scripture and then, by implication, showing him that he could not merit eternal life. Jesus taught him that everything he thought he knew about the sacred Scriptures had been misinterpreted, and then he completely demolished his self-confidence by commanding him to be "born again" (John 3:3), something that Nicodemus instantly realized he could not do. How was Nicodemus supposed to do that? Climb back into his mother's womb? Impossible—yes, and that was the point!

IT'S NOT ABOUT US—IT NEVER HAS BEEN

Like Nicodemus's contemporaries and ours, the easiest way to interpret the Bible is to make it about us and what we need to do. We take the stories of Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, and Job and turn them in toward us and make them about how we're supposed to earn God's blessings. But Jesus has a completely different take on them. He taught that all of the Old Testament was meant to point forward to the Christ, to the one who would live a perfect life and die a substitutionary death in our place. If the Old Testament and the history of the nation of Israel has taught us anything, it is that having God's law and knowing that you are special to him won't automatically make you obedient. Israel had both of these privileges and yet failed time and time again; failing finally by refusing to recognize the Messiah, the only one who could save them from their deathly inward curvature. The history of Israel (and the whole world) tells us that fallen humanity is completely unable to do what needs to be done and that

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something or someone more is needed (Deut. 29:4). We need a true sacrifice, the foretold Deliverer, the water, the bread, the wine, the Rock.

Are you beginning to see how the Son is the underlying story behind every story? Out of love for his people, for all of us who have spent our lives trying to get away from him, living as we pleased, trying to prove that we're really good enough and don't need him, suffering in isolation and wandering, God created man in his own image once again, but this time, this Man would not fail to love or obey him.

When we see Jesus portrayed on the pages of the New Testament, we're seeing God the Son who has been with his people from the very beginning, even from before Malachi or even Genesis, and is now with us not only in types or shadows but has actually become one with us, one of us! Yes, he had been with us all along, but now the Word has become flesh and actually lived like one of us, with us!

What we're about to learn in the incarnation has no parallel in nature or our natural understanding. What we're about to learn in the incarnation is not something that we can learn outside of the work of the Spirit and the condescension of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who has shown himself to us. If you're able to understand it and believe in some small way that everything is really all about him and the work he's done, that's only because God has gifted you with faith. Oh, glorious gift of faith to believe! So let there be "no patting yourself on the back here. Falling on your knees in humility is rather the appropriate response."⁹

So let us do that now. Let us approach our study of the incarnate Christ, who has been with us forever and will be with us eternally, with humility, joy, and trust. If you know who he is, it's because he wants you to know him. You are right now what you have always been: his beloved child for whom he has given everything. He is with you, and you are his beloved; it's all about him and he has found you.

FOUND IN HIM

At the end of every chapter you'll find a few questions meant to spur on your thinking. Please take time to complete them, and while these thoughts are fresh, write a four- or five-sentence summary of what you've learned here.

- 1) Why does Jesus's presence with us matter? How much do you struggle with feeling alone or alienated?
- 2) What does Paul mean when he writes that Jesus is preeminent? Have you ever thought about Jesus being preeminent in the Old Testament before?
- 3) Which one of the Old Testament narratives in which Jesus is present means the most to you? Why?
- 4) How does seeing Jesus as the subject of the whole Bible change how you interpret the Bible?
- 5) In four or five sentences, summarize this chapter.

PART 2

UNION WITH
CHRIST

Introduction to Part 2

Up until this time, we've been examining the incarnation, the Word's union with humanity. We've considered how Jesus's earthly life was lived for our benefit and for the glory of his Father. We've delved deeply into his manhood, observing his perfect fulfilling of the law, his substitutionary death on the cross, and his bodily resurrection—a resurrection that, along with his ascension, assures us of our salvation.

From this point on we're going to be spending our time considering the benefits of the work he did, particularly as our representative, brother, and husband. Of course, his primary goal in becoming man and living as he did was to complete the work the Father had given him, but this work also had another goal: to bless us, granting that all the benefits he had earned are now poured out on our unworthy yet beloved souls.

Our gaze will shift now to our union with Christ (and all its benefits), but this is no inconsequential postscript, as John Murray writes:

Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. . . . Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.¹

In shifting your focus from what he has done through the incarnation to how his work impacts us and, in particular, how our

oneness with him in all that he has accomplished transforms our identity and life, you need to understand that everything that can (and should) be said about our union with him will not be said. Volumes have been written about our union with Christ, and it is not my intention to try to duplicate others' work. This is not a systematic presentation on union and every implication of union in a believer's life. Rather, my goal is to draw you into a closer and more fully assured recognition of his presence and power in your life and how being "in" him changes everything about you and how you live your life.

“I in Them”

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual
blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us
in him before the foundation of the world.*

EPHESIANS 1:3–4

All the truths of the incarnation and our union with Christ have their genesis in the fact that God the Father chose us to be *in* Jesus, to be one with him, in indissoluble union forever. This union, oneness, or “in-ness” is so very essential to understanding our salvation that it simply cannot be overemphasized.

Thirty-three times in Paul’s letters alone he speaks of our being “in Christ” (not counting the times he speaks of union “with him” or “with the Lord”). Even though this “in-ness” is such a recurrent theme in Paul, most of us tend to be unfamiliar with it. So let’s take some time now, as we continue our discussion of union, to consider six ways Paul speaks about it in the book of Romans. Because we are one with Jesus we have the following.

REDEMPTION

Although we “all have sinned” and fallen “short of the glory of God,” we are “justified by his grace as a gift, through the *redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:23–25). *Redemption* means

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that God purchased us or bought us back from our bondage to sin and slavery to Satan through the payment of a ransom, which his justice demanded. The very life and blood of Jesus was that ransom payment, as he said: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to *give his life as a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6). He knew that the blood pumping through his veins had one purpose: to be poured out in payment for our sin. In eternity we will sing songs of worship about the redemption and ransom he purchased, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, *for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*” (Rev. 5:9).

DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD

Another facet of our union with Christ is both symbolized and formalized by baptism. In baptism we have been united with Jesus in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–4), for baptism “symbolizes [our] union with, and incorporation into, Christ.”¹ Just as Jesus was buried after his death, in the same way we too are buried with him in baptism. Baptism is the signal before heaven and to our own hearts that we believe that our sin has been paid for.

By our faith, then, we have also died to all of sin’s accusatory power, resultant allurements, and enslavement. The ink on our old life’s record of debt has been completely washed away; a new record is now ours. Because sin, guilt, and the law no longer hold sway over us, we are free to walk before God in loving, filial relationship—no longer wondering about his disposition to us—no longer exiles fearing his wrath. In this way, just as Jesus was raised from death for sin and from the grave, so we too are raised from baptismal water as completely new people in new relationship with our Father.

In light of this, Paul counsels us, “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God *in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 6:11). This means that when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, in God’s eyes we were there with him. We have already received just punishment for

our sins. We have died. We have been to the grave. Every sin that we have ever or will ever commit has already been paid for, not because of our good works or resolution to do better but because we were *in* Christ when he died in payment for our sin.

In placing us in Christ like this, in counting us dead and alive again, the Father has completely transformed our relationship with him. We are now no longer dead but are *alive* to him, because death for sin, the curse for disobedience that had hung over us since Eden, has been satisfied. Death's insatiable maw was glutted by Christ's blood.

No longer laboring under a curse for our incessant disobedience, we are now free to obey (yet fail to obey) as blessed, beloved children. We are no longer enslaved to sin's temptations, because all the guilt and resultant hatred of God and his law has been obliterated. Rather than simply telling ourselves that we ought to do better, to resist temptation, it is by remembering our union with Jesus on the cross that we are transformed: set at liberty to love righteousness and the God who has given it to us. Our former relationship with God as the just judge whom we despised (who demanded an obedience we were unable and unwilling to accomplish) has been transformed into that of a loving Father who gladly welcomes us as his Son's flawed yet beautiful bride.

This alteration in relationship with the Father changes everything about how we approach the battle against sin and obedience to the law; bondage to the law's demands as a way to secure relationship *always* elicits a sinful response on our part (Rom. 7:5), but because we have already paid the penalty for disobedience to the law and completely fulfilled all its demands in Christ, sin and the law no longer control us. God loves and welcomes us. We no longer owe payment for our sin. Jesus paid it all.

In addition, just like Jesus, we have been vindicated by the resurrection. God's renewed smile after the fury and punishment of the cross shows that Jesus's offering and life's work had been given the Father's stamp of approval. Again, the resurrection is

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God's "Amen" to Christ's "It is finished!" But that's not all. The resurrection is also God's "Amen" to our "It is finished, for I believe that when he died, I died, and when he rose, I arose; I believe that you have forgiven me and made me righteous and will raise me up on the last day."

Our entire lives—our sin, our good works, our faith, our doubt, everything, in fact—have been subsumed into him in the resurrection, and we now stand before God alive, not dead, cleansed, not vile, whole, not shattered, and welcomed, not sent away. We stand in complete righteousness and holiness, no longer dead in our trespasses but completely and eternally alive in him. We are invited to live our whole life under his benediction, his smile, his love.²

ETERNAL LIFE

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). The end of all the work we have accomplished on our own, all our supposed good deeds, all our secret sins, all our cavalier apathy, all our ignorance, diligence, self-righteousness, self-control, arrogance, friendliness, back stabbing, idolatry, and unbelief—the end of all that we can and have done apart from our union with Christ—is death. The result or fruit of our lives, of those things of which we are now ashamed, is death (v. 21).

What kind of death is this? Certainly there are plenty of arrogant idolaters strolling around in blissful unbelief today. They certainly seem alive, but they're not. The spiritual death that the Bible talks about is not usually immediate or physical at our first act of rebellion but is, rather, the death that has permeated our race since the first Adam's disobedience in the garden of Eden. You'll remember how the Lord promised that on the day Adam sinned, he would die (Gen. 2:17); and even though he didn't die physically on that day, he and every one of his progeny are immersed in a world of death from conception.

What kind of death is this? It is exile, banishment from God's presence and from his goodness. It is the wandering, lostness, futility, and judgment that has affected us all. Yes, of course it is the ultimate dissolution of our physical bodies; we are all dying right now, whether we juice organic vegetables or not; we've all been diagnosed with a terminal illness. But this death is also the dissolution of our personality, marked as it is by an absence of lasting happiness, a continual dissatisfaction with what we have, the insatiable desire for more, a terrifying recognition that we're not what we should be, all followed by full-tilt hypocrisy and masquerade. This death is marked by a constant desire to somehow get back to the "good old days," which is actually an innate desire within us all for Eden and God himself, to have relationship with him, to be welcomed to walk with him again in the cool of the day.

But it is also a spiritual death, an eternal separation from God that will be so horrific that it can only be described in the most terrifying of terms: eternal fire that will never fully consume us but will instead continue to burn forever to our unspeakable torment, while we wail over the awareness that we've made a fatal mistake from which we will never recover. Why such a terrible punishment? Because of the great value of the Son we have spurned.

But because we are in union with Christ, we are no longer reaping the wages that our sin has earned for us. No, instead we've been given God's free gift: eternal life. Notice how death is something we work for—it is our wage—but eternal life is not something we're able to earn. It is too costly; we can't pay that price. It is a gift given to us in Christ. If we have it, it is only because Jesus earned it for us and has given it to us.

Because we are united to him, we are recipients of all the indescribable blessings that belong to Christ. As the God-man, he is welcomed to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, who rejoices over him. But here's the amazing news: we are, too! He is completely loved, approved of, accepted, and delighted in, and so are we. Although our physical bodies will die (if Jesus does

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not return first), we will never taste or see death, for just at the moment it begins to clutch us, he will come and take our souls to himself. He can do this because he has conquered death. Eternal life is the life we have now, a life full of blessing and the unimaginable joy of knowing that we forever will be loved by him.

FREEDOM FROM CONDEMNATION

In Romans 6 Paul describes the life of faith—a life characterized by an ongoing recognition that we are dead to sin and alive to God—and what that life should look like. But in Romans 7 Paul describes his own life, which is characterized by his struggle with sin. It is a struggle that is summarized in this way:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate. . . . For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:15, 18–19, 24)

What is Paul's answer to his anguished quest for deliverance? Instead of pulling out his hair and slumping down in despair or making a list of how to have his best life now, he sings, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25). It is Jesus who will deliver him from his demoralizing failure as he struggles with sin, not his own efforts, not his New Year's resolutions, not by measuring his forward progress in getting his spiritual act together. Jesus alone is Paul's deliverer, and it is because Paul is assured of ultimate deliverance that he can declare (oh, precious words!), "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). When? Now. Why? Because God has already condemned our sin in the human flesh of his own Son.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous

requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3–4)

The threat of condemnation, the judgment of a just God who sees past our righteous pretensions, the wrath that abides on all who disregard his commandments—all of that condemnation is completely, utterly obliterated because we are in Jesus, and he already bore it all. He drank it all down, took it all into himself, and was crushed under it for us so that we would be completely free to love him and be loved by him.

FREEDOM FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

In Jesus we have been set free from the principle of sin and death. This liberation from the principle or law of sin and death has come to us through our union with Jesus who has given us life (1 Cor. 15:45). "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free *in* Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). The continual cycle of sin and death that marked our response to the demands of the law has been broken *because our failures have been recast as Christ's obediences*. We have been given Christ's perfect record of always having obeyed, and, second, we have been given a new heart, a heart like his, one that desires to obey out of love. This is the transformation that God promised us through Ezekiel:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:25–27)

The humanly unbreakable pattern of law-sin-death, law-sin-death has been shattered because we are now in union with him. He took that law-sin-death pattern and obliterated it by obeying the law, shunning every sin, dying in our place, and then being

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raised victorious over it. In him law-obedience-life is the pattern that marks our lives.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Our union with Christ may be summed up in these words: because the Father has immeasurable love for the Son, he has immeasurable love for us. He has immeasurable love for us because we are in the Son, part of him, one with him, married to him, part of the family. He looks at us as though we always were. When the Father looks at us, he doesn't scratch his head and wonder, "How did she get in here? What's he doing here?" No, he says, "This is my beloved daughter, my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." All because we are in union with the Son he loves.

If you've ever doubted God's love for you, it is because you aren't thinking about his love for his Son. Does his love for his Son ever change? Does it wax and wane depending on the Father's moods? No, of course not. *In addition, our "one with-ness" in him is eternal and unbreakable; our union with him is his holy vow that he will be one with us forever. Cease loving you? God can no more do that than he can cease loving his own dear Son. You're loved. You're not alone or lost. You've been found in him.*

PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

Yes, because of this "one with-ness," we have redemption, eternal life, no condemnation, freedom from slavery to the principle of sin and death, and the never-ending love of God. In addition, we also have unity with the Godhead and with other members of the church; we have grace, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We are his new creation, reconciled with God and led in triumphal procession over our enemies. Because we are in Christ, we are justified and inherit all the blessings of Abraham. We have been given eternal life and are completely free from the condemnation that our disobedience to the law had produced. We've been freed

from having to merit God's love through obedience and have been assured of his love for us, no matter how we fail. We are one body with him, dear adopted children, and have every spiritual blessing in him. In fact, right now we've been raised up and seated with him, enabled to do good works that he has already accomplished for us. We have forgiveness of sins, life, grace, and salvation, and every need has been supplied.³ This union, this "in-ness" that we have with him, is what the Christian life is all about!

WE ARE HIS TEMPLE, A HOLY BUILDING

Here's another analogy that might be helpful in understanding what our union with Christ is like: Paul calls us God's temple, the place where the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 3:16). This metaphor of a building that has been joined together is seen particularly in Ephesians 2:19–22, where Paul uses the analogy of a building that is alive, a structure that actually grows:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

This building is erected upon Jesus himself, who has "become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). Jesus Christ, who is himself our perfect cornerstone, is the foundation block of our lives, the one upon whom we are built and joined together. In light of this truth, you can see how in the religious leaders' rejection of him (Matt. 21:42), they were choosing to build their own building according to their own plans and how it was inevitable that their building would come crashing down around them (1 Pet. 2:7–8; Matthew 23).

Our union with Christ is a holy temple built upon and joined to him and in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Filled with the Holy

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Spirit, this new temple is alive and growing into a glorious building while it rests in secure relation upon the foundation he has laid through his Word.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

On the night of his betrayal, the Lord Jesus prayed to his Father, and his prayer is recorded for us in John 17. This prayer gives us insight into the conversation of the Son with the Father, and to say that it is deep, mysterious, and holy is simply a failure to find words that properly describe it. Here we are privy to the way the Son speaks to his Father at the beginning of the most trying time of his life. (Although study of this holy prayer could occupy our mind for years, we're only going to look at one portion of it. Let me encourage you to read it in its entirety in appendix 3.) What follows is the portion of the prayer that speaks particularly of our oneness with Christ:

I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:23–26)

Here we see the Son reaffirming his relationship with his Father and talking with him about those who have believed in him through the words of his disciples—us.

And here also we come to another shocking facet of our union with him: not only are we one with him but he is also one with us. Not only do we have that “in-ness” that we considered at the beginning of this chapter—not only are we in him, but (amazing truth!) he is also in us. We are in him, *and* he is in us. Consider his

words: "I in them." The depth and mystery of this unity is without a doubt beyond our understanding. Jesus likened it to the depth of unity he has with his Father. The unity the Son has with the Father is the same unity he has with us. He follows his statement, "I in them," with the astounding statement, ". . . and you in me." He compares his union with us to the perfect oneness that exists among the members of the Trinity. Of course, his prayer here is that we might come to understand our unity with one another through our unity in him and he in us, but in our eagerness to try to figure out what we're supposed to be doing, let us not gloss over the deep mystery that he's speaking of: we are in him, and he is in us in the same way that he is in the Father, and the Father is in him.

On the highest level of being [our oneness] is compared to the union which exists between the persons of the trinity in the Godhead. This is staggering, but it is the case.⁴

Consider how Jesus describes this oneness we have with the Father and Son and they have with us: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my *Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*" (John 14:23). God—Father, Son, and Spirit—*actually* lives in us, like you live in your home, if your home were alive and growing. Wonder of wonders!

Further, mystery of mysteries, Jesus rejoices in the love that the Father has for us, his Son's bride. Again, he says that it is analogous to the love that the Father has for him, his beloved Son. I wonder how much our lives would change if we marinated our souls in the truth that the love the Father has for us is the same as the love he has for his Son. Jesus said that the Father had loved him from "before the foundation of the world." So, we, too, have been loved in the same way for that long—since before the foundation of the world. His love is demonstrated in his election of us, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4).

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The Lord Jesus is in us, and with him comes the love with which the Father has loved us. “I in them.” Think of that. This union with him is far beyond anything we’ve considered so far. This reciprocal oneness is, in fact, exactly what Paul means when he writes about the rich mystery God has revealed to the Gentiles, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:26–27).

God himself, in the person of Christ, will be directly and personally present in the lives of his people, and his presence assures them of a future life with him when he returns.⁵

This indwelling of Christ within us is something far greater than anything that was known until he came as the incarnate Messiah. In the Old Testament the Lord dwelt among his chosen people, the Jews, but now, the very Son of God dwells in us, in both Jew and Gentile. This indwelling of the Spirit of Christ within us is what gives us hope for our future with him, and here we are, back again at our Lord’s prayer. He prayed that we would be with him so that we might “see” his glory and the glory of the Father; indeed we even share in his glory, for the glory that the Father had given to the Son he has given to us (John 17:22). Because Christ is in us, this is our hope:

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom. 8:10–11)

In sum, all the blessings that have been bestowed upon us are because we are in him and because he is in us. Because he died and rose again, we too have died with him and are raised again. That same Spirit that resurrected his physical body will also resurrect ours, because he dwells in us.

We’re walking into the Most Holy Place in communion with the triune God. We’ve been raised up and made to sit together in

heaven in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6). We are encouraged to draw near to him "in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22) for the simple reason that we do not approach God's throne alone but in the one who is already there, representing us. Isn't this study of our "one withness" in Christ amazing? And here's yet another way to look at it.

ADOPTED SONS (AND DAUGHTERS)

Another rich analogy that describes our union with Christ is that of adoption. As you know, adoption is a legal process whereby one person chooses to receive another person into his family and gives to that person all the privileges and advantages of the adopting family while placing upon that family every obligation that the adopted one brings with him.

In the case of our union with Christ, God has chosen to take upon himself all of our debt and obligation. Every expression of adoration and every act of obedience that we are obligated to offer to him, he has performed for us. In addition, every censure and punishment that we earned for failing to worship and obey, he has placed upon his Son. Because we are his adopted sons, we have all the rights of the other Son in the house who has borne all the wrath we deserve and earned all the inheritance we receive.

John speaks of our rights as adopted children in connection with the faith that God has willed to bestow upon us:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)⁶

Upon his return to heaven, the Son sent his Holy Spirit to the church, a gift that our standing as his children gave us a right to inherit. In that one action, he made us one with himself, binding us together with him in one Spirit.

Part of the work of the Spirit in our lives is to convince us of the astounding truths of our union with Christ, that we really are

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God's children and that we really are qualified to inherit all his treasures. We are no longer to live as fearful slaves, because our relationship with God has changed. He is no longer our just judge. He is our loving Father, who bestows good gifts on us.

Now we now have a new identity—that of God's children. We have been “filled with the Spirit, united to Christ, and given access to the Father in God's household.”⁷ He is the Lord, the King “and he desires for us to be his adopted children.”⁸ This is what the Spirit teaches us when he gives us faith to address God as our Father in the dearest terms:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ. (Rom. 8:15–17)

Are you struggling to believe? Call out to your Daddy! Are you confused or tempted? Are you sinking beneath a load of sin? Call your Father. Don't be afraid that approaching him in this way is presumptuous or will anger or disappoint him. It doesn't matter what your relationship with your earthly father might have been like. This Father is different, and he's gone so far as to share with you his Spirit—part of his own being—so that you will be assured that your cries are welcome and will always be heard and answered.

THE SON'S INHERITANCE

The Spirit also tells us that, as sons, we have an inheritance awaiting us. It is the inheritance that Christ earned for us in fulfilling every part of his Father's will. This inheritance is made up of every blessing his perfect filial obedience merited. Everything that is his is now ours, for “all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (1 Cor. 3:22–23). In addition, since we belong to Jesus, then we are “Abraham's offspring” and “heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). What is this promised inheritance?

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:2-3)

What an inheritance! It is no wonder we need a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to believe it. We need him to help us believe that these words, spoken so many years ago over Abraham, are actually words of promise to God's Son and, by his work and our adoption, spoken to us. We are not alone. We are a great nation. We are no longer cursed or in exile. In fact, not only do we have a blessing; we *are* a blessing. God will protect and care for us as part of his global, universal, and forever family, and because of the work he has ordained that we should do (Eph. 2:10), we will be a source of blessing to many other families. Does that seem hard to believe? Of course it does. But Jesus knows your weaknesses, and he has sent his Spirit to help you. Ask him for help now.

How could he adopt us? How is it that we have the rights and privileges of obedient sons? You know that answer by now, don't you? "You are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." It happened because "God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4-7). Jesus was born of a woman (one of us). He was born under the law like us, having to obey it in order to merit God's favor. And he did. It is because of his work that we have received adoption as sons.

HOW NEEDFUL IS OUR UNION

I know we've covered a lot in this chapter, and I know how mysterious this union with Christ is, but, oh, how impoverished our souls are when we neglect this sweet doctrine. How alone, how weak, and how lost we feel when we are ignorant of it. Yet it is an ocean so deep, so full, we can't even begin to skim across its surface without the help of the Spirit, and even then in starts and stumbles. Do you feel overwhelmed? Me too. Thank God for the Spirit and that he will make known to us all we need to know today.

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FOUND IN HIM

1) We have considered our union with Christ in this chapter in several ways. Consider what is precious to you about each one and write out your responses here:

- a) We are dead to sin and alive to God:
- b) We have eternal life:
- c) We have freedom from condemnation:
- d) We are freed from the principle of sin and death:
- e) We can be assured that we have the love of God:
- f) We are his temple, a living building:

2) What is it about the Lord's prayer in John 17, his being *in us*, that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

3) What is it about our adoption and inheritance that is especially meaningful to you? Why?

4) Why is Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit precious to you in light of your union with him?

5) Consider the words of the following hymn and rejoice:

Dear Saviour, I am Thine,
By everlasting bands,
My name, my heart, I would resign;
My soul is in Thy hands.

To Thee I still would cleave
With ever-growing zeal;
If millions tempt me Christ to leave,
They never shall prevail.

His Spirit shall unite
My soul to Him, my Head;
Shall form me to His image bright,
And teach His path to tread.

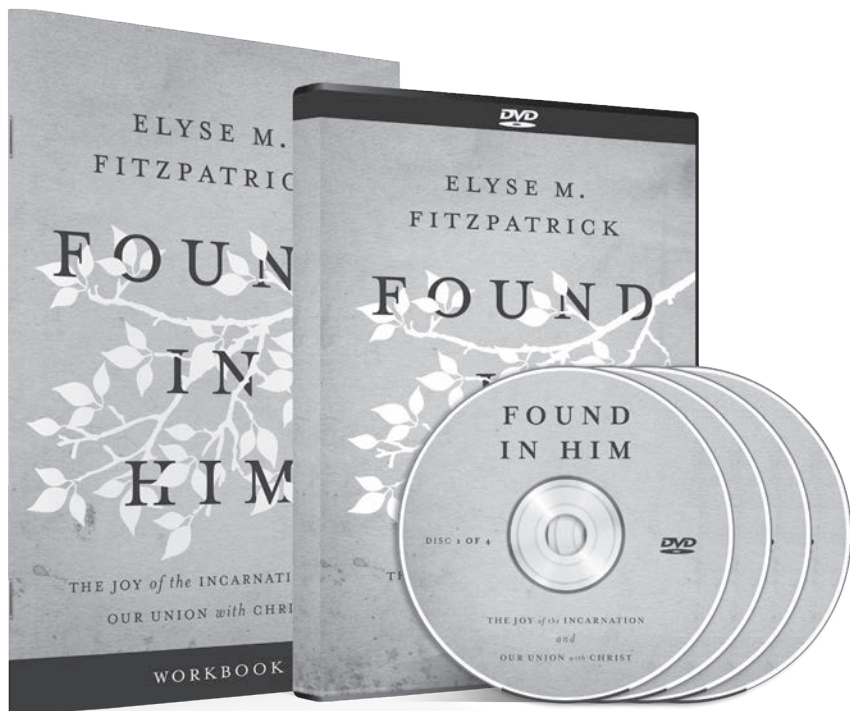
Death may my soul divide

From this abode of clay;
But love shall keep me near Thy side
Through all the gloomy way.
Since Christ and we are one,
Why should we doubt or fear?
If He in heaven hath fix'd His throne,
He'll fix His members there.⁹

6) Summarize in four or five sentences what you have learned in this chapter.

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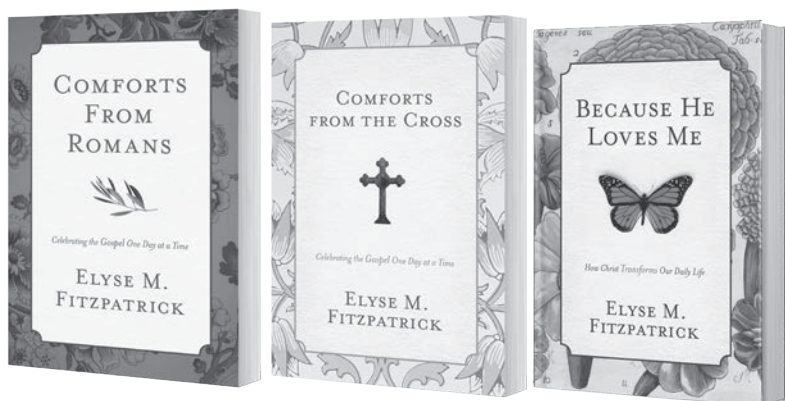


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Everyone has experienced isolation and alienation. We lost more than a nice home when we were banished from Eden. We lost relationship with God and with each other.

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THEOLOGY