

THE STORY – The Bible tells a story and you have a part to play.

90% of churchgoers say that they want to honor God in all that they do, only 19% admitted to reading the Bible daily. 18% said it was almost never.

B&N prank changing the names of sections

do we go to our Bible so little because we need to relabel it?

The Bible makes most labels limited and inadequate because it asserts that it is a story of God's people and their history. Not some epic work of fantasy. A true story. One that is eternal and cosmic and infinitely bigger than us. And yet! ...each of us has a part to play. I'd argue one reason the Church hasn't played its part well because we've lost the plot.

One theme you see throughout the Bible is **God making things new**,

2 Corinthians 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!*

As we talk about new creations, John's Gospel is beautifully crafted and begins and ends with nods to creation.

John 1:1-5 - *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it*

John **opens** his gospel pointing to his presence at creation and the garden.

John **ends** his gospel with Jesus sparking a new creation in a garden coming out of the grave into a garden in John 20.

This new creation was alluded to in John 1, verse 10-13:

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

It's the same new creative order that confounded the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

And Paul, to followers of Jesus, again and again tries to explain it in his letters.

2 Cor 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

Colossians 3:9&10 - *...you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

Romans 6:6 - *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—*

Romans 13:14 - *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh*

Galatians 3:26&27 - *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.*

And where I want to land in the text tonight – **Ephesians 4:22-24**

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

“New creations” with “new hearts” and “new clothes” can seem ethereal and hard to grasp. How does that work? How do we nail it down?

How does God create anything?

We can look to Genesis and the original account we get of God creating.

ORDER FROM CHAOS

Genesis 1:2 **“the earth was chaos and waste.”**

Chaos makes an appearance in our text tonight. Not by name..

But in Ephesians 4:17-19 it describes life outside of Christ as chaotic.

A result of sin sparked in the garden and the disorder and chaos it caused in God’s creation.

But the Bible is a story of God bringing restoration.

To what? In creation we see we are created in his image.

Romans 8:29 reads in the message version:

God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.

And in **John 1:13** as we read earlier our ability to be reborn as sons and daughters is God’s will, not man’s. John says ***it’s not by human passion or plan, but God’s will.***

God initiates rebirth,

Then he invites us into relationship. Proper relationship? **IN Christ**. As 2 Cor 5:17 says, IF anyone is IN Christ, he is a new creation

Seeds can't grow outside of soil

God creates in Genesis 1, he says "**Let there be land**"

And when it comes to our life as new creations, Jesus is the land, the soil, the sure foundation, and the solid ground and soil we can take root in.

Colossians 2:7- *Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught.*

God initiates, we cultivate.

Ephesians 4:14-15

No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are easy prey for predators. God wants us to grow up... like Christ in everything.

Philippians 2:12-13

continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose

He works WITH us.

He works in, we work out.

Genesis 2:15 – The Lord God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and take care of it.

The **ordering** of creation was something God employed Adam in. From cultivating the soil to naming the animals.

As God asks Adam to cultivate and grow the new creation in Eden
God asks us to cultivate and grow the new creation in us.

You can be born again in Christ, and still have consequences of past sin that linger.

Trauma from what's been done to you. Addictions based on what you've done.

Residual "chaos" if I can call it that tonight.

That shouldn't cast doubt on your salvation or justification through Jesus.

But it should cause a new creation to run to him.

Why?

We're reminded in the creation narrative: God redeems - he makes order from chaos.

That chaos is still subject to his creative power and ability to make all things new.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Moana - Wayfinding -*How do you navigate a boat in the dark?*

Whatever darkness we find ourselves in, from culture at large to personal circumstance - God provides a light to navigate with.

What does John call this light? **The Word.** *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

In the ancient world light was a universal symbol for **knowledge and understanding.** Ephesians shows us to be in sin is confusion, a futility and malfunction of the mind, resulting in intellectual and spiritual blackout.

What helps us throw this off? Verse 21 - *“The truth that comes from Jesus.”*

Psalms 119:105- *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*

God’s word is a light. Light and truth.

Like plants need light to grow, we need it to grow.

1 Peter 2:2 – Peter likens the Bible to **milk.** Are you getting enough to grow?

Matthew 4:4 – Jesus compares it to his **daily bread.**

1 Corinthians 3:2 – Paul compares it to **solid food.**

Psalms 119:103 – David likens it to **dessert!**

If you want to grow spiritually - you’ve got to eat.

Growing in wisdom and knowledge through God’s word isn’t just a mark of growth and maturity
It’s a mark of loving God.

Jesus gives the greatest command: ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul MIND and strength.”***

In verse 23 of our passage tonight: ***“let the spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.”***

Repentance in the Greek means to change one’s mind.

Why do we struggle?

The hard fact is about 4/5 of churchgoers don’t open their Bible outside of church.

Read – open it.

Research – ask the questions that naturally arise ...and seek the answers. Wrestle with the text.

Reflect – memorize it. Meditate on it.

EXPANSE

“Let there be an expanse...”

In Jesus’ convo with Nicodemus in John 3 about how to be born again, it can be more directly translated: ***“God so loved the COSMOS, that he gave his son”***

...the whole created expanse of the universe

And new creations, those born again, should live expansively.

Ephesians 3, Paul's prayer for the disciples of Jesus in Ephesus is that they would know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God.
In other words, how expansive it is.

And then in Ephesians 4 – we see that not living for yourself but for others is what it means to be a new creation.

Similarly in 2 Corinthians 5, we aren't born again into a life of mere personal spiritual experiences, but into a life of reconciliation – with God and others.

Reconciled to God.
Reconciled to others.

God uses others to grow us and create in us. Other voices in many forms, books, podcasts, and alike. But most importantly face to face doing life together.

SEASONS

After creating light, and after placing lights or stars in the expanse of the sky...
God says on Day 4 of creation that these same celestial bodies are to mark seasons, days and years.

Colossians 3:10: put on the new self, which is *being renewed* in knowledge in the image of its creator.

It's a present continual tense... in other words the renewal of a new creation is ongoing.
Transformation isn't a one time event.

God uses the seasons of our lives to grow us.
In life we may experience winters where there is testing and fortifying.
In other seasons like spring there may be bursts of quick growth.

God uses seasons to create in us... even... and especially... the hard seasons.

Romans 5:3-4 reads: *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*

Philippians 1:6 - *I am sure that God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns.*

Until that day... we grow in his grace as new creations.

How? With **LIGHT**
EXPANSE
and **SEASONS**.

scripture, community, and circumstance – shaping and growing us.

If you study his Word, connect with His people, and trust in Him in all seasons...
you'll grow.

Colossians 2:7- *Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught.*