

A New Way of Life

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 (Ephesians 4:17).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-32

Song: “I Will Rise”

Arthur was a college football star whose injury cut short his career. He married and took a job as a construction-site flagger. He and his wife had two sons. A divorce followed. Frustration with life and a short temper fueled abuse of his boys. It was ugly. Arthur was on a path to destruction, but that all changed when he met Jesus. His son, Bart Millard of the band Mercy Me, wrote of that change: “I got a front-row seat to see this guy go from being a monster to falling desperately in love with Jesus.”

Is there a better way to describe the kind of life change Paul talks about in today’s passage? Putting off the old and putting on the new is the process of our transformation. Our old sinful way of life leads to heartache and heartbreak. In Christ, the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts leads to love, forgiveness, and compassion.

We can become what God intends us to be. As one changes soiled clothing for clean, we can change. We don’t have to be what we’ve always been. A new way of life is possible!

Father, thank You for Your Holy Spirit’s transforming work in my life. Help me put off anything that keeps me from being like You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Wait for It

With you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you (Psalm 130:4).

Scripture: Psalm 130

Song: “In Christ Alone”

During the American Civil War, Abraham Lower enlisted in the 72nd Regiment as a sergeant on August 10, 1861. He deserted and was arrested in 1863. Later that year, he wrote directly to President Lincoln from his cell in Philadelphia. In the letter he admits to deserting and gives his family’s destitution as one reason for doing so. President Lincoln replied to the appeal, “Let Abraham Lower, 72nd Regiment Pa. Volunteers, now under arrest in Philadelphia for desertion, be pardoned and discharged from the military service of the United States.”

Full pardon is a wonderful thing! It was the compassion of President Abraham Lincoln that brought pardon to Abraham Lower. It is the compassion and grace of our Lord that brings us forgiveness and restoration. The psalmist who penned today’s passage knew this truth.

Despair and discouragement seek to harass the Lord’s people. However, for the one who waits on the Lord and hopes in Him, mercy, forgiveness, and deliverance are freely given. Sin and grief need not be overwhelming. There is hope. There is mercy. There is forgiveness. These gifts are there for all of us. We can drink deeply from His unfailing love. In Him we can enjoy full redemption.

Father, thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me hope. I will turn to You and wait on You in times of trouble and discouragement. I will trust in Your steadfast love and mercy that never fail. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Take It Seriously

[Jesus said,] “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:29).

Scripture: Matthew 5:27-32

Song: “This Is Amazing Grace”

I came across some images on my social media feed that I thought were fascinating: pictures of wolf cubs! The baby wolves looked so small, innocent, cute, and almost cuddly. Someone commented that they’d like one for a pet. It didn’t take long for someone else to reply how foolish that would be. Wolf cubs don’t stay babies. They grow into adult wolves, dangerous and deadly.

In what can be a disturbing passage for us to read, Jesus made it clear that the consequences of sin are deadly. We can’t help but wince at the graphic nature of this passage, but it’s vital that we grasp it. We can’t play games with what threatens to destroy us. Letting go of sin is crucial.

It is the height of foolishness to harbor what will become dangerous and deadly. We wouldn’t do that with a wolf cub. That would be crazy. Do we look at sin the way we look at wolves? Whatever is keeping us in sin must go.

Father, give me clear eyes to see my sin for what it is. Any sin that I have allowed into my life, help me to take it seriously and do what it takes to get free of it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Watch Out for a Critical Eye

[Jesus said,] “In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2).

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-5

Song: “We All Need Jesus”

In Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Miss Maude and Scout discuss why Arthur Radley frequently stays in his house. Miss Maude explains that Radley is a foot-washing Baptist. Miss Maude is a regular Baptist. The foot-washing Baptists, according to Miss Maude, don’t believe the regular Baptists are going to Heaven. Miss Maude tells Scout that the foot-washers come by her place and condemn her to Hell for spending too much time outdoors with her flowers and not enough time indoors reading the Bible.

It’s hard to understand, but Christians can be harsh with fellow Christians. It may have to do with insecurity or an unwise desire to compare, but we are warned about having a critical eye. The illustration Jesus uses is the ridiculous image of us trying to remove a speck of sawdust from someone else’s eye while struggling with a plank of wood in our own.

All of us have sinned. We know that. More than that, we all need Jesus. We have much more in common with each other than we might realize. May we strive to see each other clearly, not with critical eyes of judgment but with compassionate eyes of love.

Father, help me not to be in a hurry to criticize my fellow believers. Help me instead to look to Jesus, who forgives and unites us by His grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Look to the Lord

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance (Psalm 32:7).

Scripture: Psalm 32

Song: “Rock of Ages”

I grew up in Kansas and am familiar with tornadoes and other damaging storms. When the warning comes, whether through television, phone, or radio, it's time to pay attention. When the air outside becomes completely still, it's time to seek shelter. But where can you find safety from such a powerful storm? Most Kansans go to the basement. If there is no basement, the next best option is any room without windows and interior walls. In any case, people must find a safe place to hide!

What's true in a tornado can also be true for us in a spiritual sense. God's people can be devastated by sin. If we don't heed God's warnings, sin can bring destruction and devastation. Where do we go when the harsh winds of sin's consequences blast through our lives?

There is a place of deliverance for us, even from such harmful storms. There is forgiveness and cleansing in confessing our sin. Coming to the Lord in faith and humility, acknowledging our sin, allows us to be forgiven. When we come to Him, we can be assured of His help even as a flood of trouble swirls around us. We have a hiding place where we can find refuge and be helped through the storm. There, songs of deliverance surround us.

Father, thank You for forgiving me and saving me from the devastation of sin. Help me to live for You. In Jesus' name, amen.

God Knows Best

[God said,] “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

Scripture: Isaiah 55:6-13

Song: “How Great Is Our God”

The television show *Father Knows Best* first aired on CBS on October 3, 1954. After World War II, people were looking ahead with hope for a bright future. *Father Knows Best* reflected this optimism. Actor Robert Young portrayed Jim Anderson, the show’s main character. One newspaper critic at the time wrote, “Jim Anderson may be the first intelligent father permitted on TV since they invented the thing.”

The phrase *intelligent father* resonates, doesn’t it? As humans, we’re looking for someone to look to, someone bigger, greater, and wiser than we are. Although *Father Knows Best* was before my time, I’m sure Jim Anderson was a good father figure. However, we have a real Father who truly does know best, and as His children we can always come to Him.

God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. He offers forgiveness to those who seek Him. Coming to Him with our sin and pain brings refreshing and renewal. Trusting Him wholeheartedly can bring us joy that makes it seem as though all of nature is praising Him. If we are looking for a fresh start and unrestrained joy, we can look to our heavenly Father. He really does know best.

Father, thank You for forgiving me. I recognize Your wisdom and praise You for Your greatness. Thank You for all You do for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

We Can Be Forgiven

“Neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11).

Scripture: John 8:1-11

Song: “Grace Greater Than Our Sin”

A story is told of the reformer Martin Luther that, while likely fictional, has a point. According to the story, Luther had a dream in which he was being accused by Satan. The devil unrolled a long scroll containing a list of Luther’s sins. After hearing what was on the scroll, Luther asked the devil, “Is that all?”

“No,” came the reply, and additional scrolls were produced.

“You’ve forgotten something!” Luther exclaimed. “Quickly write on each of them, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sins.’”

Today’s passage describes a powerful episode of forgiveness that gives hope to all who’ve missed the mark. The religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery. They knew the law and wanted to see what Jesus would do. Jesus, though, turned the tables on them. The thud of dropped rocks is the only sound the accusers made as they left. Whether this account is in the original manuscripts or not does not detract from it. Throughout Scripture, Jesus’ character is marked by a willingness to see beyond people’s labels.

What once was doesn’t have to be what is. Jesus offers us forgiveness and a fresh start.

Father, thank You for loving and forgiving me. Thank You for a fresh start. In Jesus’ name, amen.