

**CHRIST IN ME,  
THE HOPE OF GLORY**

*Living the Indwelling Christ Before a Watching World*

# CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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*“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” — Colossians 1:27b*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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*Living the Indwelling Christ Before a Watching World*

*“...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” —*  
**Colossians 1:26–27 (NASB)**

## BOOK OVERVIEW & VISION

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**There is a truth at the center of the Christian gospel so staggering, so world-reshaping, so personally transformative that the church has struggled for two thousand years to fully absorb it.**

It is not merely that our sins are forgiven — though that alone would be enough to undo us with gratitude. It is not merely that we have been declared righteous before the throne of God — though that verdict alone would silence every accusation that has ever echoed in the chambers of our shame. It is not even merely that one day we will be raised to glory and made complete in ways we cannot presently imagine — though that hope alone would be enough to carry us through any suffering the world can devise.

The truth that exceeds all of these — the truth that undergirds and energizes every one of them — is this:

*The same Christ who walked the roads of Galilee,  
who raised the dead and stilled the seas,  
who died on a Roman cross and rose triumphant from a borrowed tomb,  
**now lives inside every believer.***

Not symbolically. Not as a theological concept to be affirmed. Not as a distant memory to be honored or a future hope to be anticipated.

**Actually. Personally. Powerfully.** Right now. In you.

This is the declaration of Colossians 1:27. This is what Paul calls the mystery of the ages — the secret that was hidden through all the long centuries of the Old Covenant and is now, in this new and final age, fully and publicly disclosed. And the mystery is not a doctrine, not a system, not a formula. The mystery is a Person. Christ in you — the hope of glory.

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### **The Crisis: Information Without Formation**

If you were to walk through the average evangelical congregation on any given Sunday, you would encounter people who know a great deal about Jesus. They can recite the Romans Road. They have attended Bible studies. They have prayed the sinner’s prayer. Many have been faithful churchgoers for decades. They believe, with genuine sincerity, that Jesus died for their sins.

And yet something is missing.

You see it in the exhaustion on faces that should be lit from within. You hear it in conversations where faith has become obligation rather than oxygen. You feel it in the quiet desperation of people who have been told that the Christian life is about following Jesus — and who are discovering, painfully, that they cannot keep up. They are trying, with everything they have, to be what they believe a Christian should be. And it is not working.

The great diagnostic question of our moment is not: “Does the church have enough information about Christ?”

The answer to that question is clearly yes. We are drowning in information. We have access to more sermons, more books, more podcasts, more theological content than any generation of Christians in history.

The great diagnostic question is this: “Is the church being formed by Christ from within?”

And the honest answer, for far too many believers, is no.

*“We have the most theologically informed, most biblically literate, least spiritually transformed generation of believers in the history of the church.”*

— **Dallas Willard**

The crisis of the contemporary church is not a lack of information about Christ. It is a lack of formation by Christ from within. We have reduced the most staggering announcement in human history — that the King of the universe has taken up residence in human flesh, in ordinary men and women, in first responders and laborers and parents and recovering addicts and the wounded and the weary — to a theological footnote. We have made the indwelling Christ a doctrine to be affirmed rather than a Person to be inhabited.

And the watching world has noticed.

They see a church full of people who claim to be inhabited by the God of the universe and yet live with the same anxiety, the same selfishness, the same brokenness, the same lack of genuine love and peace that marks everyone else. They are not unreasonable to ask: if what you say is true — if the risen Christ actually lives inside you — why doesn't it show?

This book exists to answer that question. Not defensively. But with the pastoral conviction that the answer is not "Try harder." The answer is "You've been trying to live the Christian life in the wrong direction — from the outside in instead of from the inside out.

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### **A World-Altering Truth, Fully Inhabited**

Consider what it would mean — genuinely, practically, in the ordinary fabric of your actual life — if the truth of Colossians 1:27 were not merely believed but lived.

It would mean that when you walk into a burning building, you carry the One who is the resurrection and the life into the darkest place.

It would mean that when you sit across from someone whose marriage is disintegrating, you bring not just sympathy but the actual presence of the Wonderful Counselor.

It would mean that when you face the impossible situation, the crushing diagnosis, the betrayal you did not see coming, the long darkness after the rooster crows — you are not facing it alone and not facing it from your own resources. You are facing it from the inside out. The One who faced death itself and defeated it is the One who faces it with you, in you.

It would mean that you don't have to manufacture love for people who are unlovable, because the One who loved you while you were unlovable is the One who loves through you.

It would mean that your failures are not the final word, because the One who makes all things new — who takes the stripped, damaged, discarded, and restores them to something more beautiful than they were before — is the One who dwells in the very humanity that has been stripped and damaged and broken.

*"Christianity is not a religion about what man must do for God, but the Good News of what God has done in man. The Christian life is not our attempt to live for Christ. It is Christ's life lived through us."*

**— Major Ian Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ***

This is not inspirational language. This is not a motivational upgrade to an otherwise ordinary spiritual life. This is the actual, unadorned claim of the New Testament — that through the mystery of the Incarnation, the death, the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God has done something in human beings that has never been done before in all of history: He has made his home in them.

And if that is true — really, actually, permanently true — then the Christian life is not primarily about what we do for God. It is about who God is in us, and how that transforms everything else.

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### **Who This Book Is For**

This is a pastoral book, not an academic one. It is written with theological seriousness because the truth it carries demands nothing less. But it is written for real people in real situations, not for scholars constructing systems.

It is written for four kinds of people in particular:

#### **The Exhausted Believer**

You have been trying, sincerely and with everything you have, to live the Christian life. You have read the books, attended the conferences, set the goals, made the commitments. And at the end of the day, you are tired in a way that sleep does not fix. You feel a persistent sense of failure, a gap between what you know you should be and what you actually are. You wonder if something is wrong with you — if you are simply not spiritual enough, disciplined enough, faithful enough.

You are not broken. You are operating in the wrong direction. This book is for you.

*“The exhausted Christian is not someone who has failed to try hard enough. They are someone who has been trying to do from the outside what only Christ can do from the inside.”*

— Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

#### **The Church-Wounded**

You have been hurt by the institution that was supposed to heal you. You have watched spiritual authority exercised as power. You have been told — explicitly or implicitly — that your brokenness disqualifies you. You have sat in pews feeling invisible, or worse, felt that the version of Jesus on offer in that building was a stranger to the One you met in your darkest moment. You have not abandoned faith. But you have not found a home for it.

The Christ this book describes is not the manager of a religious enterprise. He is the One who took up residence in you at your most desperate and has never left. This book is for you.

### **The Pastor and Ministry Leader**

You know the architecture of the gospel better than almost anyone. You have preached it, explained it, defended it, counseled others through it. But somewhere in the machinery of ministry, you lost the experience of it. You have been so busy helping others encounter Christ that you have neglected the encounter yourself. You are giving out of a reservoir that is no longer being replenished.

There is a sustainable way to lead and serve — not from the wellspring of your own competence, personality, or spiritual intensity, but from the inexhaustible life of the One who dwells within you. This book is for you.

### **The First Responder, the Laborer, and the Everyday Saint**

You do not have a “religious” job. You drive a truck, work a line, run a station, raise children, pour concrete, respond to accidents, make arrests, fight fires. You spend most of your waking hours in environments where the language of church does not naturally fit. And sometimes you wonder if your faith is real precisely because it does not look like what they show in the Sunday brochure.

The Christ this book describes is not limited to sanctuaries. He walked through fishing boats and carpentry shops and Roman-occupied streets. He touched lepers and talked to prostitutes and ate with people nobody else would eat with. He showed up at the most ordinary and the most desperate moments of human life and made them holy. He has not changed. He is still showing up in the places nobody photographs for the church website. And He is in you, in all of it. This book is for you.

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### **The Thesis: Our Only Hope**

Every book worth writing has a central claim — one idea that it exists to make, defend, and embody. The central claim of this book is simple enough to fit on a single line, and deep enough to spend a lifetime exploring:

*Christ in us is not our aspiration.*

**It is our only hope.**

The phrase is Paul's — and the word "hope" in the New Testament is never wishful thinking. It is confident expectation grounded in something real. When Paul writes that Christ in you is the hope of glory, he is not saying "Maybe, if you try hard enough, you might one day be glorious." He is saying: the guarantee of your complete transformation, your final wholeness, your ultimate fullness in God — that guarantee is not a program or a practice or a personality trait. It is a Person. And that Person is already in you.

This means the Christian life is fundamentally a life of recognition, not achievement. It is learning to recognize and live from what is already present. It is not climbing toward Christ. It is learning to live from Christ who has already descended and taken up residence.

It is not the acquisition of a spiritual life. It is the discovery that the Source of all spiritual life is already within.

*"The whole work of God in salvation may be condensed into this one word — Christ. Not Christ and something else. Not Christ as a starting point from which we move on. Christ in you. That is the whole thing."*

— **A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God**

This truth, fully inhabited, is not just personally transformative. It is missionally explosive. A church full of people who actually live from the indwelling Christ does not need a marketing strategy. It does not need a better program or a more compelling weekend service. It needs nothing except what it already has: men and women in whom the risen Christ is visibly, tangibly, undeniably alive.

That is what the watching world is waiting for. Not a better argument. Not a more sophisticated theology. A community of people through whom Christ has clearly taken up residence and is clearly at home.

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### **The Core Scripture**

*"...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." —*

**Colossians 1:26–27 (NASB)**

This single verse contains the whole architecture of the Christian life.

Paul calls it a mystery — but in Paul's usage, mystery does not mean something incomprehensible or inaccessible. *Mysterion* in the Greek refers to something that was previously hidden in the divine counsel and has now been publicly disclosed. The veil has

been pulled back. What God was doing all along through the Old Covenant, through the prophets and the sacrifices and the tabernacle and the Temple, has now been fully revealed.

And the mystery, Paul announces, is not a complex doctrine. It is not a sophisticated theology. It is a Person.

Christ in you.

Notice the richness of what Paul surrounds this announcement with. He calls it “the riches of the glory of this mystery.” That is a remarkable density of superlatives — riches, glory, mystery — stacked on top of one another to communicate that this disclosure is not one truth among many. It is the truth that illuminates all other truths. The wealth of the gospel is concentrated here, in this three-word announcement: Christ in you.

And then the consequence: the hope of glory. The indwelling Christ is not a past event to be grateful for, though gratitude is entirely appropriate. He is a present reality who is at this very moment producing within us the transformation we cannot produce ourselves — the slow, certain, unstoppable work of being conformed to the image of the Son, beginning now and completing on the last day.

*“The mystery of Colossians 1 is not a puzzle to be solved. It is a Person to be received. And once received, everything changes.”*

— **N.T. Wright, Colossians and Philemon**

This is our core scripture because it is Paul’s core announcement. The entire letter to the Colossians is, in one sense, an extended meditation on this verse. And this book follows the same logic: starting here, going deeper, and ending with the practical, daily, visible, world-facing reality of a life shaped by this truth.

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### **Book Architecture: Three Movements**

This book is organized around three movements that mirror the journey of every serious disciple. They are not sequential stages you pass through once and leave behind. They are movements in a deeper sense — like movements in a symphony, each one building on what came before, each one returning to themes established earlier, each one necessary to the whole.

### **MOVEMENT I**

#### **DISCOVERY**

### *Understanding What Dwells Within*

Before you can live from a truth, you must fully grasp it. The first movement of this book is devoted to excavating the full weight of what Paul announces in Colossians 1. Many believers have heard that “Christ is in you” as a spiritual pleasantries — a nice thought, a reassuring idea. The goal of this movement is to make it impossible to keep treating it that way.

We will examine what Paul means by “mystery” and why the disclosure of Christ’s indwelling is the hinge point of all human history. We will explore the difference between Christ being with us and Christ being in us — a difference that reshapes the entire logic of the spiritual life. We will sit with the Colossian hymn (1:15–20) and let the full, cosmic, unprecedented scope of who indwells us begin to expand our sense of what is possible.

The goal of Movement I is a settled, astonished, life-reorganizing knowledge of the One who dwells within.

## **MOVEMENT II**

### **SURRENDER**

#### *Learning to Live from the Inside Out*

Knowledge of the indwelling Christ, as essential as it is, is not enough on its own. The second movement addresses the great practical question: how do I actually live from this reality rather than merely believing it? How does the truth of Colossians 1:27 reach from the theological register into the Tuesday morning register — into the argument with my spouse, the impossible situation at work, the old habit that won’t release its grip?

The answer Paul gives in Galatians 2:20 is among the most radical words in human literature: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” The second movement is a sustained pastoral exploration of what co-crucifixion means, what abiding looks like in ordinary life, and what it means to be “filled” with the One who already indwells you.

The goal of Movement II is a practical, sustainable, daily posture of surrender — not as defeat but as the most courageous and active thing a human being can do.

## **MOVEMENT III**

### **EXPRESSION**

#### *Displaying Christ Before a Watching World*

The indwelling Christ is not a private spiritual possession. He is the most public thing in the world. Every person in whom Christ genuinely lives and moves is a walking disclosure of the mystery of the ages to a world that is watching, whether it knows it is watching or not.

The third movement turns outward — not away from the interiority of the first two movements, but through it and beyond it. We will examine what Paul means by calling us “the aroma of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14–15), what it means to be “living letters” read by everyone (2 Corinthians 3:2–3), and how the community of the indwelling Christ becomes the most compelling and credible witness available to a skeptical world.

This movement gives particular attention to those whose daily environment is not a church building — the first responder, the laborer, the parent, the business owner. The incarnational Christ does not stay in sanctuaries. He goes where His people go. And He is fully present and fully sufficient in every place they carry Him.

The goal of Movement III is a missional life that flows naturally from the indwelling Presence — not a burden assumed from the outside, but a fragrance released from within.

### **A Final Word Before We Begin**

There is an old legend — almost certainly not historical, but deeply true — about a craftsman who could look at a piece of damaged, scarred, seemingly ruined furniture and see, before anyone else could, exactly what it was meant to be. Not what it had become under years of damage and neglect. What it was always intended to be — the grain, the beauty, the strength that was there from the beginning, waiting to be revealed.

He would take it into his workshop and begin the long, patient work of stripping away what didn't belong, repairing what had been broken, restoring the surface to its original integrity. And what came out of that workshop was always more beautiful than what went in — not because it had been replaced, but because it had been restored to what it always was.

This is what Christ in you is doing. He is not replacing you. He is restoring you — from the inside out, from the center outward, from the grain of your truest self toward the fullness of the image of God that was always intended to emerge from your particular life.

And He is doing it now. Not when you are holier. Not when you have your act together. Not when you have resolved your doubts or overcome your failures or become the kind of Christian you think you're supposed to be. He is at work in you right now — because He lives in you right now.

The mystery has been disclosed. The hope of glory has taken up residence. The question before every page that follows is simply this:

***Will you live from what is already true?***

*“...Christ in you, the hope of glory.” — Colossians 1:27b (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### INTRODUCTION

*The Most Astonishing Truth You May Have Forgotten*

*“...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” —*

**Colossians 1:26–27 (NASB)**

### OPENING NARRATIVE

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**The call comes in at 0230.**

Structure fire, fully involved, possible occupants. You pull up to the address and for a split second the scene looks almost manageable — smoke pushing from the eaves, nothing too alarming from the exterior. A neighbor on the sidewalk points upstairs. “Somebody’s still in there.”

You’ve been here before. Not this address, but this moment. You know what experienced firefighters know: the outside of a structure tells you almost nothing about what’s happening inside. A building can look intact from the street and be a minute from collapse. Walls can be cool to the touch and be concealing a fire that has been traveling through the void spaces for an hour. The thermal camera tells a different story than your eyes.

Every experienced first responder learns this the hard way, and carries it as a kind of professional wisdom: never trust the exterior. The most important reality is always interior.

It is the same with patients. You get a call — unresponsive male, late fifties, history of cardiac issues. You arrive and he’s sitting up. He looks okay. He tells you he’s okay. But you don’t trust the presentation — you trust the monitor. And the monitor tells you something the exterior presentation concealed: there is a crisis happening inside that no amount of looking at the outside would have revealed.

The most critical reality is always interior.

You put this principle on in the bay before every shift. You apply it to every call, every patient, every scene. It is one of the foundational axioms of your professional life.

What if you applied it to yourself?

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Not to your circumstances — as real and pressing as those are.

Not to your failures — as heavy and familiar as those have become.

Not to your fears — as insistent and persuasive as they are at three in the morning.

Not to your future — as uncertain and sometimes terrifying as that feels.

What if the most important reality in your life right now — the reality that everything else either flows from or fails to account for — is not any of those things?

What if the most important reality in your life right now is Someone who lives inside you?

Not a metaphor. Not a theological concept you signed on to when you said a prayer. Not a distant authority to be feared or a cosmic employer to be appeased or a historical figure to be admired.

A Person. Present. Indwelling. Alive.

The same Person who walked the dusty roads of first-century Galilee, who looked at a storm-tossed sea and told it to be still, who reached into tombs and pulled out the dead — that same Person has taken up residence inside every man and woman who has received him by faith. Not symbolically. Not aspirationally. Actually.

This is not a new idea dressed in fresh language. This is the central announcement of the New Testament — a truth so staggering that Paul called it the mystery of the ages, a secret hidden through all of human history and only now, in this new and final era, fully disclosed.

And somehow, in the noise and pressure of ordinary life, we have forgotten it. Or perhaps we never fully heard it. Or we heard it and filed it under “nice thoughts” rather than “the most important fact about my life.”

This book is an invitation to hear it again. For the first time, if necessary.

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## **The Crisis: Christians Living as Practical Orphans**

*“The most radical thing about the Christian faith is not its moral demands but its audacious claim that God actually comes to live inside human beings.”*

— Dallas Willard

**There is a particular kind of pain that is difficult to name precisely because it sits at the intersection of genuine faith and genuine confusion.**

It is the pain of the person who truly believes — who would not for a moment deny the reality of God, the truth of the gospel, the historical fact of the resurrection — and who is, despite all of that, living as though they are fundamentally alone. As though the resources they bring to each day are their own resources, and when those run dry, there is nowhere to turn except toward greater effort, greater discipline, greater spiritual striving.

Henri Nouwen gave this experience a name. He called it living as a “practical orphan” — theologically adopted, experientially abandoned. You have been told that you belong to the Father. You believe it. But in the daily lived experience of your faith, you function as though you are on your own. As though the adoption is a legal status rather than a living relationship. As though the indwelling Christ is a theological fact rather than a daily, breathing, transforming Presence.

*“We may say we believe in the indwelling Spirit, but in practice we live as functional deists — God is out there somewhere, and we are in here, doing our best.”*

— Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

This practical orphan posture is not a failure of intelligence or sincerity. It is a failure of formation. It is what happens when the church successfully communicates the facts of the gospel — Christ died for your sins, you are forgiven, heaven awaits — without successfully communicating the present, indwelling, transforming reality that the gospel inaugurates. We have given people a destination without teaching them who dwells in them for the journey.

And the result, in the lives of millions of sincere, earnest, genuinely believing men and women, is a spiritual life that is exhausting rather than enlivening, obligatory rather than free, and — if we are honest — largely indistinguishable from the moral effort of anyone who simply tries very hard to be a good person.

## **The Orphan Posture: Three Consequences**

The practical orphan posture does not produce neutral results. It produces specific, recognizable, pastoral realities that pastors and chaplains encounter weekly.

Understanding these consequences is not an exercise in criticism but in diagnosis. You cannot treat what you cannot name.

### **It Drives Religious Performance and Burnout**

When you believe — functionally, practically, in the way your nervous system registers the world — that you are responsible for your own spiritual condition, that the gap between what you are and what you should be must be closed by your own effort, you enter into an exhausting and unsustainable cycle.

You try harder. You read more. You pray longer. You attend more services, volunteer for more roles, discipline yourself into more rigorous spiritual practices. And for a season, the effort produces results. You feel better about yourself. You feel closer to the version of a Christian you are supposed to be.

And then life hits. The pressure mounts. The old patterns resurface. The distance between your performance and the standard you've set for yourself opens up again. And the conclusion you draw — almost automatically, because you have no other framework — is that you simply did not try hard enough. So you try harder.

This is the treadmill of religious performance. And the destination at the end of that treadmill, for those who stay on it long enough, is burnout: the particular exhaustion of someone who has given everything they have to a life they were never designed to live under their own power.

*“Burnout is not primarily a failure of will or discipline. It is a structural failure — the failure of a spiritual system that asks human beings to produce what only God can produce.”*

— **Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines***

This is not a minor pastoral issue. It is an epidemic. The pews — and the spaces of those who no longer attend pews because the exhaustion drove them out — are full of people who burned themselves to the ground trying to live a life they were never meant to live under their own steam.

### **It Produces a Gap Between Sunday Faith and Monday Life**

There is a familiar phenomenon among people who work in ministry or chaplaincy: the gap. The Sunday self and the Monday self. The person who sings with evident conviction on Sunday morning and who, by Tuesday afternoon, is operating in exactly the ways that faith was supposed to change.

This gap is so common, so normalized, that many believers have simply accepted it as the permanent condition of Christian life. Faith is what happens at church. The rest of life is

what happens everywhere else. And the two are connected by obligation — I should try to bring my faith into the rest of life — but not by integration. Not by a single, coherent, inside-out reality that shapes everything equally.

The practical orphan lives a compartmentalized life by necessity. If God is not genuinely present and active within you — if the indwelling Christ is a doctrinal position rather than a lived reality — then faith becomes one department of life among others rather than the animating center from which all other departments draw their life.

The station house and the sanctuary. The job site and the pew. The crisis scene and the quiet time. For the practical orphan, these are different worlds with different rules. For the person who lives from the indwelling Christ, they are all the same world — because the same Person inhabits all of it.

*“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” — Colossians 3:17 (NASB)*

Paul’s “whatever you do” is radically comprehensive. There is no department of life that falls outside the jurisdiction of the indwelling Christ — not the paperwork, not the difficult colleague, not the sleepless night, not the impossible call, not the ordinary Tuesday. The compartmentalized life is not a failure of Paul’s imagination. It is a failure to inhabit Paul’s theology.

### **It Leaves the Watching World Unconvinced**

Here is perhaps the most painful consequence of the practical orphan posture: it is visible to people who do not share our faith.

The watching world is watching. And what it is watching for — whether it articulates this or not — is evidence. Not evidence that Christianity is intellectually defensible. Not evidence that the Bible is historically reliable. Not evidence that the church’s social ethics are internally consistent.

Evidence that the thing Christians claim is actually true. Evidence that the risen Christ is not a proposition to be defended but a Person who is living and active in human beings. Evidence that when someone is inhabited by the King of the universe, it makes a detectable difference in how they live.

When the watching world encounters a community of people who claim to be inhabited by the God who made the stars — and who are, by all available evidence, as anxious, as selfish, as conflict-ridden, as morally compromised as everyone else — the conclusion it draws is not unreasonable: whatever they have, it doesn’t appear to be working.

This is not an indictment of sincere believers. It is a pastoral diagnosis of what happens when the most powerful reality in the universe — the indwelling Christ — is treated as a doctrine to be believed rather than a Presence to be inhabited. The watching world cannot see our doctrines. But it can see our lives. And our lives are the primary apologetic available to us.

*“The world does not need more Christian information. It needs more Christians in whom Christ is unmistakably, visibly, practically alive.”*

— **Brennan Manning, The Signature of Jesus**

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### **The Proposal: A Life Lived from the Center**

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* — **Galatians 2:20 (NASB)**

**Paul wrote these words from inside his own experience — not as a theologian constructing a system, but as a man who had been absolutely undone and then absolutely reconstituted.**

He had been Saul of Tarsus: educated, ambitious, zealous, morally rigorous, operating at the highest levels of religious performance his tradition could produce. By every external standard, he was succeeding at the spiritual life. He was living for God with everything he had.

And then, on a road to Damascus, the living Christ appeared to him. And in that encounter everything Saul thought he understood about the relationship between God and human effort was dismantled and rebuilt from the ground up.

The autobiography he produces in Galatians 2:20 is not simply his story. It is the template — the pattern, the architecture, the organizing logic — for every believer’s life. It is Paul saying: this is not what happened to me. This is what the gospel does.

### **Three Movements in One Sentence**

Galatians 2:20 contains three statements, each one more extraordinary than the last.

The first: “I have been crucified with Christ.” Paul does not say “I am trying to die to myself.” He does not say “I should be more crucified than I currently am.” He uses the perfect passive — a completed action with ongoing effects. Something has already happened. At the cross, the old self — the self defined by its own striving, its own identity management,

its own attempts to construct a life under its own power — was executed. This is not aspiration. It is declaration.

The second: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” This is the hinge of the entire Christian life. The agent of the living has changed. It is not merely that Christ assists the old self in living better. It is that Christ has replaced the old self as the animating center of the life. The “I” that remains is a new “I” — a self reconstituted around the indwelling Presence rather than its own autonomous striving.

The third: “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” The crucified and reconstituted self still lives in a body, in the world, in ordinary time and space. But the mode of living has been transformed. It is a life of faith — trust, reliance, dependence — in the One who loved and gave himself. Not earning. Not striving. Trusting.

*“Paul’s Galatians testimony is not a description of the super-spiritual elite. It is the description of the normal Christian life. The abnormal Christian life is the one in which we are still the agent of our own spiritual existence.”*

— **Watchman Nee, The Normal Christian Life**

### **The Organizing Distinction**

There is a distinction at the heart of Galatians 2:20 that this book will return to again and again, because it is the distinction on which everything turns:

*The Christian life is not us living for Christ.*

#### **It is Christ living through us, in cooperation with our yielded will.**

This distinction is not subtle. It is not a minor theological adjustment. It is the difference between a life of constant, anxious effort to close the distance between yourself and God — and a life of constant, trusting attention to the One who has already closed the distance by taking up residence within you.

It is the difference between a branch straining to produce fruit — and a branch receiving sap from the vine and discovering that fruit is the natural result.

It is the difference between a restored piece of furniture that has been painted over and over in an attempt to hide its damage — and a piece that has been stripped down and refinished from within, revealing the grain and beauty that was always there, waiting.

Living for Christ produces the practical orphan: the exhausted, performance-driven, Sunday-Monday-gap-living, unconvincing-to-the-watching-world version of the Christian life that has become so common that many people assume it is the normal version.

Christ living through us — the indwelling life, the life of surrender and trust and habitual attention to the One who is already within — produces something altogether different. Not perfection. Not the absence of struggle or failure or darkness. But an inside-out quality, a fragrance, a visible testimony that is not manufactured and cannot be faked. The watching world recognizes it when it sees it. And it is hungry for it.

This distinction — living for Christ vs. Christ living through us — is the organizing principle of this entire book. Everything that follows is an exploration and application of what it means to live from the second of those two realities rather than the first.

*“The entire Christian life can be reduced to two options: the life of self-effort, and the life of Christ-dependence. Both are painful. Only one bears fruit.”*

— Major Ian Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ*

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### **A Note on Method: How This Book Is Built**

**Every book that engages the spiritual life is built from somewhere — from a set of sources, a tradition, a method of interpretation and application.**

This one is worth being explicit about, because the sources matter and because they come from a range of traditions that do not always talk to one another.

### **The Colossian Letter as Primary Text**

The spine of this book is Paul’s letter to the Colossians. This is not an accident. Colossians is Paul’s most concentrated, most explicit, most theologically dense treatment of the indwelling Christ. If you want to understand what the New Testament actually claims about Christ’s presence within the believer — not as a peripheral theme but as the central organizing reality of the Christian life — there is no better place to stand than inside this letter.

We will move through Colossians with care, neither racing past the theological depths nor getting lost in them. The goal is always the same: from the text to the life. What does this mean? And what does it mean for Tuesday morning?

### **The Supporting Voices of Scripture**

Colossians does not stand alone. The New Testament is remarkably unified in its witness to the indwelling Christ, even when the language and emphasis vary. We will draw heavily from:

- The Gospel of John, particularly chapters 14–17 — Jesus’s own extended teaching on the coming of the Spirit and the mutual indwelling of the Trinitarian life in the believer
- Paul’s letter to the Galatians, particularly chapter 2 — the most personal and autobiographical expression of co-crucifixion and the indwelling life
- Paul’s letter to the Romans, particularly chapters 6–8 — the doctrinal architecture of the new life in the Spirit
- Paul’s letter to the Ephesians — the corporate and cosmic dimensions of the indwelling Christ in the community of believers
- Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians — the public, visible, missional dimension of the indwelling life

All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), chosen for its precision and fidelity to the Greek and Hebrew texts.

### **The Great Tradition of Interior Christianity**

The theology of the indwelling Christ is not a modern innovation. It is one of the oldest and deepest streams in Christian spiritual formation — and it has been carried, often against the grain of institutional religion, by men and women who paid the full price for taking it seriously.

This book draws from that tradition, not uncritically but gratefully. The voices you will hear include:

- The Desert Fathers and Mothers — the fourth and fifth-century men and women who fled into the Egyptian and Syrian deserts not to escape the world but to discover what it meant to live entirely from the interior presence of God. Their sayings and stories are windows into a quality of interiority that most of us have barely glimpsed.
- Thomas à Kempis — whose *Imitation of Christ*, written in the fifteenth century, remains one of the most read and most searching explorations of the interior life in Christian history. His great question — “What does it profit you to enter into deep discussion concerning the Holy Trinity if you lack humility?” — is the question of someone who knows the difference between knowledge about Christ and formation by Christ.
- Brother Lawrence — a seventeenth-century monk and kitchen worker whose *Practice of the Presence of God* is perhaps the most practical guide ever written to

the habitual, moment-by-moment attention to the indwelling Presence. He did not practice the presence of God in the chapel. He practiced it while peeling potatoes. His witness is essential for anyone who wants to live the indwelling life in a first responder's bay or on a construction site.

- A.W. Tozer — the twentieth century's most urgent voice calling the evangelical church back from theological correctness to genuine spiritual experience of the God within. His *Pursuit of God* and *The Divine Conquest* remain among the most important pastoral books written in the last century on the interior life.
- Brennan Manning — whose ragamuffin theology of grace without qualification and the Abba's child identity gave a generation of the broken and the church-wounded a way back into the truth that God genuinely inhabits the people nobody else would inhabit. His work is particularly important for the audience this book is written for.
- Dallas Willard — the philosopher-pastor whose *Spirit of the Disciplines* and *The Divine Conspiracy* remain the most rigorous and most accessible contemporary accounts of what it means to arrange your life around the reality of the indwelling kingdom and the present, active, formative work of Christ within.

These voices are not all in agreement on every point. They come from different traditions — Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, Wesleyan, evangelical. But they are in agreement on the thing that matters most: that the Christian life is not primarily about external religious behavior but about the interior reality of Christ's presence, and that this interior reality is meant to be experienced, not merely affirmed.

*“The great spiritual teachers of the church, across every tradition, are unanimous on one point: the life of God within us is not a doctrine to be mastered but a Presence to be inhabited. Everything else they disagree about; on this they agree.”*

— **Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ***

### **A Pastoral, Not an Academic, Purpose**

This book is not a work of academic theology. It does not attempt to resolve every exegetical dispute or engage every scholarly conversation about the Pauline texts. There are excellent resources for those who want to go deeper in those directions, and a suggested reading list is included in the appendix.

The purpose of this book is pastoral: to take theology that is real, to bring it to bear on lives that are actual, and to do so with enough theological seriousness that the application is grounded in truth rather than sentiment.

If you finish this book and walk away with a richer understanding of Pauline theology but the same exhausted, outside-in spiritual life you started with, the book has failed. The measure of success is not what you know when you close the last page. It is whether you have begun to live differently — from the inside out, from the indwelling Presence, from the only hope that has never failed and never will.

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### **How to Read This Book**

This book is organized into three movements. You can read them straight through — they build on each other and are designed to be read in sequence. But they are also written to be returned to. The first movement is not something you finish and leave behind. Discovery is not a one-time event. Formation is not a sprint.

At the end of each chapter you will find a small set of reflection questions. These are not rhetorical. They are invitations. The person who reads this book straight through without pausing to sit with the questions will learn some things. The person who slows down at the questions and lets them do their work will be formed by something.

There is a difference between those two outcomes, and it is exactly the difference this book is about.

If you are reading this in a small group or a formation community, the questions can anchor conversations that go deeper than most church settings allow. The indwelling Christ is not a solo reality. It is meant to be explored in community — which is itself part of the argument of Movement III.

If you are a first responder, a chaplain, a laborer, or someone whose daily environment bears no resemblance to a sanctuary — you are exactly who this book is written for. The sections that address your specific context are marked throughout. But every word of this book is addressed to you, because the indwelling Christ does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular. He is fully present in the bay, the cab, the site, the kitchen, the station — everywhere you go, He has been there before you, and He goes there in you.

There is one thing more.

This book will ask you, repeatedly, to do something that is simple but not easy: to believe, practically and in the moment, that the most important reality in your life is not what is happening around you but Someone who lives within you. To orient your attention, your trust, your daily habits around that interior Presence rather than the exterior circumstances.

This is the whole proposal. Everything else is commentary.

**Christ in you.**

***The hope of glory.***

*Let's begin.*

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” — Galatians 2:20 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT I

#### DISCOVERY

*Understanding What Dwells Within*

*“The Christian life is not difficult — it is impossible. That is why Christ must live it.”*

— Major Ian Thomas

### CHAPTER ONE

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#### The Mystery Revealed

*Christ Is Not Just With You — He Is IN You*

*“...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” —*

**Colossians 1:26–27 (NASB)**

**Imagine standing outside a building you have passed a thousand times.**

You know the address. You know the history. You know what it was built for and who built it. You have studied the blueprints. You have read everything written about what is inside. You can describe the interior architecture to anyone who asks, with accuracy and confidence.

And yet you have never gone in. You have never felt the weight of the door swinging open under your hand, never let your eyes adjust to the interior light, never stood at the center of the space and experienced from the inside what you have spent so long examining from the outside.

This is the condition of a great many sincere, intelligent, theologically literate Christians in their relationship to the truth this chapter is about.

They know about the indwelling Christ. They can locate the relevant verses. They have heard the doctrine explained from pulpits and in Sunday school classrooms. They would affirm, without hesitation, that the Holy Spirit dwells within every believer.

But they have never gone in. They have never crossed the threshold from the exterior knowledge of the indwelling Christ to the interior experience of Him. They are standing outside a reality that has been available to them since the day they first believed, reading the description on the outside of the door.

This chapter is an invitation to open the door.

But before we can walk through it, we need to understand what we are walking into — what Paul actually means when he announces, with barely contained astonishment, that “the mystery” of the ages has been revealed, and that the mystery is not a doctrine, a system, or a new set of rules.

The mystery is Christ in you.

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#### **The Passage: Colossians 1:24–29**

Before we examine the specific phrases that will carry this chapter, it is worth stepping back and reading the full passage from which our key verse is drawn. Context is everything, and Paul’s announcement in verse 27 does not arrive from nowhere.

*“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” — Colossians 1:24–29 (NASB)*

Notice the architecture of this passage. Paul begins with suffering — his own, real, bodily suffering in the service of the church. He is not writing from a comfortable remove. He is writing from the inside of a difficult life, and he is writing with joy. Already the indwelling reality he is about to announce is visible in the character of the announcement: a man in chains, rejoicing, because he has access to something that suffering cannot reach.

He introduces himself as a steward — someone entrusted with goods that belong to another. His task is to “fully carry out the preaching of the word of God” — and specifically, he says, this means disclosing a mystery that has been concealed through all the ages of human history.

That mystery is the subject of this chapter. And the chapter that follows it. And, in one sense, this entire book.

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### **Section 1.1 — What Paul Means by ‘Mystery’**

**The word Paul uses — *mysterion* in Greek — is one of the most important and most consistently misunderstood words in his theological vocabulary.**

In ordinary English, a mystery is something puzzling, something you cannot figure out. It carries connotations of obscurity, hiddenness, perhaps deliberate obfuscation. When we call something a mystery in everyday speech, we usually mean: this is unclear, this is confusing, this does not yield easily to rational analysis.

This is not what Paul means.

In the New Testament, *mysterion* has a specific, technical meaning that is almost the opposite of the English connotation. A mystery, in Paul’s usage, is something that was previously concealed in the divine counsel and has now been publicly, fully, and permanently disclosed. It is a secret that has been revealed. The emphasis is not on the hiddenness but on the unveiling.

Think of it this way: a mystery in Paul’s sense is not a locked room. It is a room that has just been unlocked, and the door is now standing open, and Paul is standing at the threshold saying: “Look. Look at what is in here. This is what God has been doing all along. This is where everything was always heading.”

*“The mystery of God is not a puzzle to stump the brilliant. It is a disclosure that staggers everyone — a secret so large that once revealed, you wonder how anyone could have missed the hints.”*

— N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*

### **Hidden Through the Ages of the Old Covenant**

Paul says this mystery has been hidden “from the past ages and generations.” This is not a small claim. He is saying that through the entire sweep of Old Testament history — through Adam and Noah and Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets and the exile and the

restoration — this particular disclosure was being held back. Not because God was being coy. But because the fullness of time had not yet arrived.

The Old Covenant was not a mistake. It was not a failed first attempt that God had to scrap and replace. It was a preparatory stage, a long and careful education of a people who would eventually receive the fullness of what God had always intended. The Law, the sacrificial system, the Temple, the Psalms, the prophetic hope — all of it was real, all of it was given by God, and all of it was pointing toward something it could not itself deliver.

*“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.” — Hebrews 10:1 (NASB)*

The writer of Hebrews says it plainly: the Law was a shadow. Not a lie — a shadow. And a shadow is real. It tells you something true. But it is not the thing itself. You cannot live in a shadow. You cannot be warmed by a shadow. You cannot be transformed by a shadow.

The mystery that Paul announces in Colossians 1 is the thing itself, finally arrived — after all the shadows, all the types, all the anticipatory gestures of the Old Covenant. The fullness that the shadow was always pointing toward.

### **Prefigured in the Temple**

Among all the shadows of the Old Covenant, none pointed more directly toward the mystery of the indwelling Christ than the Temple.

The entire architecture of Israelite worship — from the wilderness Tabernacle to the magnificent structure Solomon built in Jerusalem — was organized around a single, governing reality: God dwells with his people. The Shekinah glory, the cloud that filled the Temple at its dedication, the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies — all of it was Israel’s most vivid, most tangible, most emotionally and liturgically powerful expression of the truth that God was not distant, not absent, not inaccessible, but present. Here. Among them.

But the key word in that last sentence is “among.”

God dwelt among his people in the Temple. Near them. With them. Accessible to them through the priestly system, through the sacrifices, through the prescribed rituals that maintained the possibility of approach. But not in them. Not inside them. The closest any ordinary Israelite could come to the presence of God was the outer courts. Only the priests entered the Holy Place. Only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies — once a year, at Yom Kippur, behind the thick curtain that separated the presence of the living God from the rest of humanity.

That curtain was a theological statement as much as an architectural one. There is a distance here that cannot be crossed without mediation, without sacrifice, without extraordinary qualification. The presence of God is real. But it is not available to everyone, at all times, in all circumstances. There is a barrier.

And then — on the day Christ was crucified, at the moment of his death — that curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom.

*“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.” — Matthew 27:50–51 (NASB)*

Top to bottom. God tore it — not from the bottom up, as a man reaching for what was above him, but from the top down, as God reaching toward what was below Him. The barrier that had defined the entire Old Covenant era of worship was removed. Not gradually. Not partially. Completely, violently, permanently.

But the tearing of the curtain was not the final statement. The final statement was Pentecost. Because what the tearing of the curtain announced was that God was no longer confining his presence to a structure made of stone. He was about to pour his presence into structures made of flesh. The Temple was not being abolished. It was being relocated.

*“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” — 1 Corinthians 3:16 (NASB)*

This is not poetic language. Paul is making a claim about ontology — about what is actually, really, structurally true. You are the Temple. The Shekinah that once filled a building in Jerusalem now fills the men and women who have received Christ by faith. What the architecture of the Old Covenant pointed toward has been realized. God does not dwell in temples made of stone. He dwells in human hearts.

This is the mystery. Not a theological proposition. An inhabitation.

*“The great ambition of God throughout all of history was not to build a magnificent building but to take up residence in a magnificent creation — the human being, made in His image, now reconstituted as His dwelling place.”*

**— Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society***

### **Now Fully Realized: The New Has Come**

Paul’s announcement in Colossians 1:26 is written with the urgency of someone who has seen the disclosure and cannot contain his astonishment. “but has now been manifested to His saints.” The contrast is temporal and total. Then: hidden. Now: manifested. Then:

shadows and types and anticipatory gestures. Now: the thing itself, fully arrived, fully available.

This nowness is not incidental. It is part of the pastoral weight of the announcement. Paul is not pointing his readers toward a future hope, though the hope of glory certainly includes a future dimension. He is pointing them toward a present reality. The mystery is not something you will one day experience if you are faithful enough or spiritual enough or disciplined enough. It has been “manifested to His saints” — which is to say, to every person who belongs to Christ.

To you. Now. As you are. In the life you are living today.

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### **Section 1.2 — The Staggering Specificity of ‘In You’**

*“The New Testament does not say that Christ is in the world. It says that Christ is in you. This is not a doctrine to be affirmed; it is a Person to be encountered.”*

— A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

**There are three words in the Greek text of Colossians 1:27 that carry the entire weight of the mystery Paul is announcing.**

Christos en hymin.

Christ in you.

We have heard these words so often, in so many contexts, that their strangeness has been worn smooth. They arrive in our ears like a familiar phrase we stopped listening to years ago. The goal of this section is to restore their strangeness — to make them strange enough again that they can do their work.

#### **The Greek: En Hymin**

The preposition Paul uses is en. In Greek, this is one of the most precise words available for indicating location or intimate relationship. It does not mean near. It does not mean beside, or alongside, or in the vicinity of, or within reach of.

It means inside. Within. In the interior of.

En hymin means in you — and the “you” (hymin) is plural, meaning Paul is addressing not just each individual but the entire community of believers. Christ is in each of you, and in all of you together. The indwelling is personal and communal at the same time.

The same preposition — en — appears in Jesus’s vine-and-branches teaching in John 15:

*“Abide in Me, and I in you.” — John 15:4a (NASB)*

And again in John 14:20, where Jesus describes the mutual indwelling of the entire Trinity in the believer:

*“In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” — John 14:20 (NASB)*

This is participatory union. Not proximity. Not influence. Not moral example. Union. The same kind of relational intimacy that exists within the Trinitarian life — the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father — is the kind of intimacy that exists between the risen Christ and every person who has received him.

This should stop us cold. Jesus does not describe the relationship between himself and his disciples the way you would describe a teacher and a student, or a leader and a follower, or even a friend and a friend. He describes it the way you would describe the relationship between the members of the Trinity. An interpenetration. An indwelling. A union so intimate that the language of location almost breaks down under the weight of what it is trying to say.

### **Not Forensic Status — Participatory Union**

The Western Christian tradition has, for understandable historical reasons, tended to place the weight of its soteriology — its doctrine of salvation — on forensic categories.

Justification. Acquittal. The declaration of righteousness. These are real, important, irreplaceable dimensions of what Christ accomplished on the cross.

But they are not the whole story. And they are not the deepest story.

The forensic categories describe a legal transaction: your guilt transferred to Christ, his righteousness credited to your account. This is gloriously true. But it is a description of what happened in the courtroom, not what is happening in the living room. It is the announcement of your adoption, not the experience of your new family life.

Paul’s en hymin is not a forensic statement. It is a relational and ontological one. It is not describing a transaction that occurred in the past and whose effects you now enjoy at a distance. It is describing a presence that is current, active, interior, and transforming.

*“Justification declares you righteous before God. The indwelling Christ makes you righteous from within. Both are essential. But the second is the one we have most neglected, and the one the church most desperately needs to recover.”*

**— Thomas F. Torrance, The Christian Doctrine of God**

You are not primarily a pardoned criminal who has been released on good behavior and must now try to stay out of trouble. You are a person who has been invaded by the living God, reconstituted from the inside out, made a dwelling place for the King of the universe.

The difference between those two pictures is the difference between a life of anxious performance and a life of quiet, confident, inside-out transformation.

### **The Specificity Is the Point**

Tozer's observation — “The New Testament does not say that Christ is in the world. It says that Christ is in you” — is worth dwelling on because the specificity is not accidental. It is the point.

God is omnipresent. He is in the world. He is sustaining every atom of the created order at every moment. In that general sense, Christ — through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:16–17) — is present everywhere.

But that is not what Paul is announcing. Paul is not announcing omnipresence. He is announcing indwelling. He is announcing that the same God who is generally present everywhere has chosen to be specifically, personally, relationally, intimately present in you. In the particular human being that you are, with your specific history and your specific wounds and your specific capacities and your specific calling.

Not in humanity in general. Not in the church as an abstraction. In you.

This is what makes the announcement a mystery worth announcing. The universe is full of the general presence of God. What is staggering — what has been hidden and is now being disclosed — is that this God has chosen to make a home in specific human beings. That the Creator of galaxies has taken up residence in the fire station, the construction site, the kitchen, the recovery meeting, the hospital room — in every place where a man or woman who belongs to Christ is standing.

*“The indwelling Christ is not a general principle. He is a particular Person who has made a particular choice to live in a particular you.”*

— **A.W. Tozer, The Divine Conquest**

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### **Section 1.3 — The Hope of Glory: What This Indwelling Promises**

**The second half of Paul's announcement is easy to misread if we come to it with the wrong assumptions.**

“The hope of glory” sounds like it might be pointing toward a future destination — the glory that awaits us in the life to come, the final consummation toward which Christian hope is oriented. And it is that. The eschatological dimension is real, and we will return to it.

But if we read “hope of glory” as purely future — as only about where we are going and not at all about what is already at work in us — we miss the present, transforming, already-operating dimension of what Paul is announcing.

### **The New Testament Meaning of ‘Hope’**

The Greek word Paul uses here is *elpis*. And in New Testament usage, *elpis* is not what we mean in contemporary English when we say “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow.” That kind of hope is uncertain. It is wishful. It describes a desired outcome that may or may not occur.

New Testament hope is categorically different. It is confident expectation grounded in something real. It is certainty about a future reality — not certainty based on human projection or optimism, but certainty based on the character of God and the reality of what Christ has already accomplished.

When Paul writes “the hope of glory,” he is saying: the indwelling Christ is the guarantee of your complete transformation. He is the downpayment, the firstfruits, the living foretaste of a completion that has already been secured and is already underway.

*“Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” — 2 Corinthians 5:5 (NASB)*

The word translated “pledge” (*arrabon* in Greek) is a commercial term — the first installment of a purchase that obligates the buyer to complete the full payment. The Spirit — the Spirit of the indwelling Christ — is God’s *arrabon*, his binding down payment on the full inheritance of glory that is coming. You are not hoping that God will eventually show up. He has already made a binding commitment by showing up now, in you, as a down payment on what is coming.

### **Present Glory**

But “hope of glory” is not only about the future. The indwelling Christ is not merely a deposit on a future glory that has nothing to do with the present. He is already at work, already transforming, already doing in you what you cannot do for yourself.

Paul’s great parallel passage is in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” — 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)*

The transformation is present tense and progressive. From glory to glory. Not a sudden leap from what you are to what you will be, but an ongoing, inside-out process of being changed into the image of the One who dwells within you. The glory that is coming is the completion of a work that has already begun. And the One who is doing the work is the One who lives inside you right now.

*“Our entire sanctification is nothing more or less than Christ fully formed in us.”*

— **John Wesley**

Wesley’s formulation is precise: sanctification is not your effort to become more like Christ. It is Christ forming himself in you. The agent of your transformation is not your willpower, your discipline, your spiritual effort — as real and necessary as those things are in their proper place. The agent of your transformation is the indwelling One.

This has enormous pastoral consequences for how we approach the spiritual life. If sanctification is primarily your effort to climb toward a standard, then the primary spiritual posture is striving. If sanctification is primarily Christ forming himself in you, then the primary spiritual posture is yielding, attending, cooperating with what the indwelling One is already doing.

### **Glory as Trajectory**

One more dimension of “hope of glory” deserves attention: the word glory itself.

The Hebrew word *doxa* (glory) in the Septuagint — the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Paul regularly quotes — carries a weighty cluster of meanings. It refers to the manifest presence of God. The *Shekinah* cloud. The weightiness and splendor of the divine reality. When Moses asked to see God’s glory in Exodus 33, he was asking to see the full, unmediated reality of who God is.

When Paul says the indwelling Christ is the hope of glory, he is saying: the trajectory of the life in which Christ dwells is toward the full, complete, unmediated reality of the image of God. Not just forgiveness. Not just heaven as a destination. The restoration of the image of God in human beings — the completion of the project that was always the point of creation, derailed by the Fall, now recovered and being completed through the indwelling Christ.

You were made for this. Not for religious performance. Not for moral compliance. Not for endurance of a difficult world until heaven rescues you from it. You were made to be a dwelling place for the living God, and through that indwelling, to be transformed into the fullness of the image in which you were originally created.

The indwelling Christ is the hope of that glory. And that glory is not only coming. It is already, quietly, from the inside out, underway.

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#### **Section 1.4 — The Contrast: Christ With vs. Christ In**

**To fully appreciate the weight of Paul’s announcement, it helps to understand what came before it — not just historically, but in the experience of the disciples themselves.**

The Gospel of John preserves a conversation that took place on the night Jesus was betrayed — the Upper Room discourse of John 13–17. In this extended farewell, Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is about to happen. He is telling them, as clearly as he can, about the nature of the relationship that lies ahead. And what he describes represents the most significant upgrade in the entire history of the relationship between God and human beings.

#### **With You: The Old Covenant Pattern**

*“That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” — John 14:17 (NASB)*

The contrast in this single verse is stunning. The disciples, at this moment, have the Spirit abiding with them. This is not nothing. The Old Covenant was not a Godless era. The Spirit of God was genuinely present and active throughout the entire sweep of the Hebrew scriptures — moving over the waters at creation, resting on the judges and the prophets and the kings, filling Bezalel the craftsman with skill for the building of the Tabernacle, speaking through the mouths of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

With is real. With is genuine relationship. With is more than the world has.

But Jesus is about to announce something that makes with look like the porch when you have been invited into the house.

#### **In You: The New Covenant Inauguration**

The second half of John 14:17 is a future tense: “and will be in you.” Jesus is speaking of what Pentecost will inaugurate — the pouring out of the Spirit not on or with or beside the disciples, but in them. Inside them. The barrier that the Temple architecture had symbolized — the barrier between the presence of God and ordinary human beings — will be permanently removed, not just for one person once a year in one specific location, but for every believer, at every moment, in every place.

The preposition changes everything. With describes an external relationship. In describes an interior inhabitation. With means God is available to you. In means God has taken up residence in you. The difference is not theological hairsplitting. It is the difference between having a remarkable friend you can visit and having that friend move into your house, not as a guest but as the animating presence of the household.

### **The Trinitarian Indwelling: John 14:20**

*“In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” — John 14:20 (NASB)*

Jesus’s statement in John 14:20 is among the most extraordinary sentences ever spoken. He describes the relationship between the disciple and himself using exactly the same relational structure as the relationship within the Trinity: the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father. The mutual, coinherent indwelling of the Trinitarian life — what the theologians call perichoresis — is the model and the template for the relationship between Christ and the believer.

You in Me. I in you. The same prepositions. The same mutual interiority.

This is not a casual comparison. Jesus is not saying “our relationship is somewhat analogous to the relationship within the Trinity.” He is describing a genuine participation in the Trinitarian life. The believer is drawn into the interior relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit — not as a fourth member of the Trinity, but as a participant in the life that flows between them.

*“The New Covenant is not an improved moral code. It is an invitation into the interior life of the Trinity. Every believer who has received Christ is living — or is meant to be living — from inside the Trinitarian communion.”*

**— Jurgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom**

The Upper Room discourse in John 14–17 does not merely explain what the indwelling means. It describes the most intimate relationship available in the universe — a relationship that God himself initiated, at enormous cost, because the with of the Old Covenant was never the destination. The in of the New Covenant was always the destination.

### **The New Covenant Is an Inhabited Life**

All of this — the tearing of the Temple curtain, the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Upper Room discourse, Paul’s announcement in Colossians 1 — converges on a single pastoral conclusion:

The New Covenant is not an improved set of rules. It is an inhabited life.

The Old Covenant said: here are the standards. Comply with them and you will be blessed. Fail to comply and you will bear the consequences. It was an external covenant — written on tablets of stone, located in an ark, housed in a Temple, accessible through a priestly system.

The New Covenant says: I will put my Spirit within you. I will be in you. You will be in Me. The standards have not been lowered — Jesus makes clear in the Sermon on the Mount that the standards of the New Covenant are, if anything, more searching than the Old. But the power by which those standards are met is no longer external. It is interior. It is the indwelling Christ who fulfills the law in and through the believer who is yielded to him.

*“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” — Ezekiel 36:27 (NASB)*

The prophet Ezekiel saw this coming from six centuries before the Incarnation. The new covenant that God was promising would not ask human beings to obey from the outside in. It would produce obedience from the inside out — because the One who does the obeying would be living within. The law would no longer be an external demand but an internal life, because the Lawgiver himself would have taken up residence.

This is what you have. This is what dwells within you. This is the mystery that was hidden and is now fully disclosed. Not a better strategy. Not a more demanding moral framework. Not a religious system that, if followed carefully enough, will eventually produce a life that looks like what God intended.

A Person. Inside you. Right now.

*“The great mystery of the Christian faith is not that a man died for us — though that is astonishing — but that the risen Man now lives in us.”*

— Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

*“Christ does not give us the resources for living the Christian life. He is the resource.”*

— Major Ian Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ*

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## **The Door Is Open**

**We began this chapter with the image of a building you have passed a thousand times but never entered.**

We have spent these pages examining the outside of the door — what the word mystery means, what the Greek preposition *en* carries, what the hope of glory involves, what the contrast between *with* and *in* implies. This has been necessary. You cannot walk through a door you have not noticed. You cannot inhabit a reality you have not yet grasped.

But examination of the door is not the same as going through it.

The invitation of this chapter — and of the two chapters that follow it, and of the entire movement of this book — is to go through. To stop treating the indwelling Christ as a doctrine you affirm and start treating him as a Person you inhabit. To stop approaching each day with the question “How can I live for Christ today?” and start approaching it with the question “How can I live from Christ today — from the One who already lives in me?”

This is not a minor adjustment. It is a reorientation so fundamental that it changes the entire posture of the spiritual life. It is the difference between the orphan and the child. The orphan knows about the Father. The child has learned to live from him.

The door is open. It has been open since the moment you first believed. The curtain was torn two thousand years ago. The Spirit was poured out. The mystery was disclosed. Christ took up residence in you.

Everything that follows in this book is an exploration of what it means to live in the room that is already yours.

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### **Reflection Questions**

Take time with these questions. Don't rush them. They are not comprehension questions — there are no correct answers. They are invitations to honesty, and honesty is always the first movement of formation.

- In practical terms — not theologically, but in the actual lived experience of your daily life — do you live as though Christ is in you, or as though he is somewhere you must reach? Be specific. Think about yesterday.
- What would change tomorrow if you lived from this truth rather than toward it? Name one concrete situation in your current life where the answer to this question is most urgent.

- Where do you most struggle to believe that Christ actually dwells in you? Is it in your failures? Your ordinariness? Your specific vocational context? What does that struggle reveal about your operating theology?
- The chapter describes the contrast between with and in. Where in your spiritual life have you been treating the indwelling Christ as if he were merely with you, rather than in you?
- The tearing of the Temple curtain is one of the most dramatic moments in all of Scripture. What does it mean for your daily life that the barrier between God's presence and your ordinary humanity has been permanently removed?

*"...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." — Colossians 1:26–27 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT I • CHAPTER TWO

#### Union, Not Just Forgiveness

*The Full Scope of What Salvation Accomplishes*

*“But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” — 1 Corinthians 6:17 (NASB)*

**There is a kind of poverty that is invisible precisely because it looks like wealth.**

A man who has been given a mansion but lives in the foyer has more than almost anyone. If you described his situation to someone on the outside — he has a mansion, he sleeps there, it is entirely his — the description would sound enviable. But if you saw him every morning, eating breakfast on a folding chair just inside the front door, never venturing past the entrance hall into the rooms that were built for him, you would recognize something tragic: a man who has inherited everything and is living as though he has almost nothing.

This is the picture of a great deal of contemporary Christianity.

We have been given everything. The New Testament is relentless on this point — every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:23), complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10), partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The inheritance is staggering. The language the New Testament uses to describe what has been given to believers strains against the limits of human vocabulary.

And yet the majority of sincere, genuinely converted Christians are living in the foyer.

They have forgiveness. They know it, they treasure it, and it is genuinely theirs. But forgiveness is the foyer — the entry point, the door, the threshold. It is not the house. It is not the fullness of what has been prepared for them. It is the beginning of the journey, not the destination. And somewhere along the way, the church handed them a map to the foyer and called it the whole of the gospel.

This chapter is about the rest of the house.

It is about what Paul means when he writes, in one of the most understated and yet most explosive sentences in the New Testament, that the one who joins himself to the Lord is

“one spirit with Him.” It is about the difference between a gospel that pardons criminals and a gospel that reconstitutes human beings from the inside out. It is about union — the summit of salvation, the deepest dimension of what Christ accomplished, the reality that makes everything else possible.

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## **Section 2.1 — The Poverty of a Merely Forensic Gospel**

**To understand why union matters so much, it helps to understand what we lose when we reduce the gospel to its forensic dimensions alone.**

The word forensic comes from the Latin *forensis*, meaning “of the forum” — the public place where legal and civic business was conducted in Roman society. A forensic act is a legal act: a declaration, a verdict, a ruling that changes someone’s legal status. In the Christian tradition, forensic categories describe what happened at the cross in terms of law and justice: our guilt was transferred to Christ, his righteousness was credited to our account, the verdict of condemnation was overturned, and we stand before God as those who have been declared righteous.

This is not a minor or peripheral theological category. It is real, it is essential, and it is glorious. The Reformation was right to recover it from centuries of obscuring theology. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is not something to be minimized or soft-pedaled. It is the declaration that changed the world.

But it is not the whole of the gospel. And when it is treated as if it were — when the entire weight of the Christian life is placed on the forensic transaction that occurred at conversion — something specific and predictable goes wrong.

### **What a Purely Forensic Gospel Produces**

When the gospel is primarily a legal transaction — my guilt for his righteousness, my condemnation for his acquittal — the Christian life that follows has a particular shape. It is a life organized around the question: how do I respond appropriately to what has been done for me?

The answer the purely forensic framework generates is, almost inevitably, try harder to be worthy of it. I have been forgiven an enormous debt. The appropriate response is moral seriousness. I must now live in a way that honors the sacrifice that was made. I must not squander the grace that was extended. I must close the gap between the person I was forgiven for being and the person I should now become.

This sounds right. It sounds serious and grateful and theologically responsible. And there is something true in it. Gratitude is a genuine and appropriate response to forgiveness. The problem is not the gratitude. The problem is the framework in which the gratitude is being expressed.

Because if the gospel is primarily a transaction — something that happened in the past, the benefits of which I now carry as a legal status — then the Christian life is primarily my effort to leverage that transaction into behavioral change. I am forgiven, therefore I must live differently. I must produce the fruit of the Spirit. I must overcome sin. I must love my enemies, serve the poor, pray without ceasing, be transformed by the renewing of my mind.

All of these things are genuinely required. None of them can be generated by a legal status.

And so the man or woman whose entire gospel is forensic finds themselves in the position of someone who has been handed an extraordinary gift and told: now use this to change everything about yourself. The gift is real. The expectation is real. But the power to fulfill the expectation is entirely absent from the framework. And the result, played out across millions of lives, is what we described in the Introduction: performance, shame, exhaustion, and the slow collapse of a faith that was never given the resources it needed to sustain itself.

*“We are not merely pardoned criminals. We are sons and daughters who share the very life of God. To know only the first and not the second is to live in the anteroom of redemption.”*

— **Thomas F. Torrance**

Torrance’s image is exactly right: the anteroom. You have entered the building. You are legally, formally inside. But the anteroom is not the house. The pardon is not the inheritance. The acquittal is not the union. And a life lived only in the anteroom, however grateful and theologically correct, is a life that has stopped short of what God prepared for it.

### **Moralism: The Fruit of the Forensic Reduction**

There is a specific pathology that emerges when forgiveness is the whole of the gospel: moralism. Moralism is not the same as morality. Morality is the genuine transformation of character that flows from a transformed heart. Moralism is the external management of behavior in response to an external standard, without any corresponding interior change.

Moralism is what you get when you take the requirements of the Christian life — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control — and attempt to produce them through willpower and discipline and accountability structures and

behavioral modification, because the interior transformation that would produce them naturally is either unknown or untouched.

Moralism looks like Christianity from the outside. The moralist attends church, reads the Bible, avoids obvious sins, performs the expected spiritual disciplines. But the interior life is organized not around the indwelling Christ but around the management of reputation — before God and before the community of faith. The question driving the moralist is not “Who is Christ in me?” but “Am I measuring up?”

And the answer to that second question, for anyone honest enough to ask it seriously, is always the same: not quite. The standard is real. The gap between the standard and the performance is real. And the gap generates shame. And shame generates either more straining effort — the performance spiral — or despair and eventual abandonment of the attempt.

*“Moralism is the attempt to live the Christian life without the Christian life. It is the fruit of a gospel that delivers pardon without presence, forgiveness without formation, acquittal without union.”*

— **Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy***

This is not a peripheral pastoral problem. Walk through any congregation of any size and denomination and you will find it — often in the people who appear most committed, most serious, most engaged. The ones who are trying hardest are frequently the ones most enslaved to the moralist framework, because their seriousness will not permit them to stop trying, and the framework they are operating in will never give them the interior transformation they are straining toward.

There is a better country. It is available now. It is not earned by greater effort. It is entered through a different door — through the door of union rather than the door of transaction, through the experience of the indwelling Christ rather than the management of his requirements.

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## **Section 2.2 — What ‘One Spirit’ Really Means**

*“But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” — 1 Corinthians 6:17 (NASB)*

**This verse appears in a passage about sexual immorality, which is the reason it is often preached in a narrow context and rarely examined for its full theological weight.**

Paul is making an argument in 1 Corinthians 6 about why sexual sin is uniquely damaging for a Christian — why it is not, as some in the Corinthian community apparently believed, simply a physical act with no spiritual consequences. His argument hinges on a claim about the nature of union. Physical union, he says, creates “one flesh” (verse 16, drawing from Genesis 2:24). It is not merely mechanical or recreational. It is the joining of persons at a depth that the body itself expresses and participates in.

And then Paul draws his parallel: the person who joins himself to the Lord — the Greek is *kollaomenos*, literally “the one being cemented to” or “the one being glued to” — is one spirit with him. Not one flesh. One spirit. A union at the deepest level of personal existence, a joining of the human spirit with the Spirit of Christ that is analogous in its intimacy to the physical union that creates one flesh.

This single verse is one of the most theologically significant and most consistently underpreached in the entire Pauline corpus. It deserves to be examined with full seriousness.

### **Not Merged Identity — Shared Life**

The first thing that needs to be said about “one spirit” is what it does not mean.

It does not mean the dissolution of the human person into the divine. Christian mysticism has sometimes been misread — and sometimes genuinely misrepresented — as teaching that the goal of the spiritual life is the absorption of the individual into God, the loss of selfhood in the divine ocean. This is not what Paul means, and it is not what the New Testament teaches.

The union Paul describes is the union of persons, not the dissolution of persons. A marriage that creates “one flesh” does not destroy the two individuals who enter into it. They remain themselves — distinct, particular, irreducible human beings with their own histories, personalities, and callings. What changes is not their individuality but the depth and nature of their connection. They are joined. They share a life. What belongs to one belongs to both. They are, in the deepest sense, no longer two separate accounts but one household.

The union of the human spirit with the Spirit of Christ is like this, only deeper. You do not cease to be you. Your history, your personality, your specific giftedness, your particular calling in the world — none of these are erased. They are, if anything, more fully themselves in union with Christ than they were in isolation from him. The vine does not erase the character of the branch. It gives the branch the capacity to be what it was always designed to be.

*“Union with Christ does not swallow up the human person. It restores and perfects the human person, because the One with whom we are united is the One in whose image we were made.”*

— **John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion**

### **The Mystical Realism of Paul’s Union Language**

One of the most striking features of Paul’s letters, when you read them with fresh attention, is the sheer density of union language. The phrases “in Christ,” “with Christ,” “through Christ,” and “Christ in me” appear with a frequency that suggests they are not decorative. They are load-bearing. They are the structural framework within which everything else Paul says makes sense.

The phrase “in Christ” alone appears in Paul’s letters approximately 164 times. One hundred and sixty-four times Paul reaches for this particular preposition to describe the fundamental location of the Christian life. Not in the church. Not in compliance with the law. Not in moral achievement. In Christ.

This is not a metaphor for membership in a religious community, though it has communal dimensions. It is not a metaphor for intellectual assent to a set of doctrines, though it involves belief. It is a description of location — of where the Christian actually exists, at the deepest level of their being. In Christ. Inside the person of the Son of God, as the branch is inside the vine, as the child is inside the household of the father.

Then there is the reciprocal: Christ in me. The indwelling moves in both directions. You are in Christ — located within him, held by him, defined by your position within his life. And Christ is in you — inhabiting you, animating you, working within you the very transformation that your being in him has secured.

And then there is the most sheltered expression of all:

*“For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* — **Colossians 3:3 (NASB)**

Hidden with Christ in God. The layers of security and intimacy in this phrase are extraordinary. Your life is not merely in Christ. It is in Christ who is in God. You are held within a union that is itself held within the Trinitarian life. There is no safer place in the universe than the location Paul describes in Colossians 3:3. And it is your location. Right now. Today.

### **The Vine and the Branch: Different Substances, One Life**

The image Jesus uses in John 15 — the vine and the branches — is perhaps the most accessible picture of what union actually looks like from the inside.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” — John 15:5 (NASB)*

A vine and its branches are, botanically speaking, different things. The vine is the root and the central stalk — the source of life, the conduit of the nutrients drawn from the earth, the structural backbone of the plant. The branches are the extensions of the vine — not the vine itself, but inseparable from it in terms of the life they carry.

A branch that has been cut from the vine is still, technically, a branch. It retains its shape. For a brief period, it may even retain the appearance of life — the leaves not yet wilted, the wood still flexible. But the life that was flowing through it has been severed. It is now drawing on reserves that will soon be exhausted. And once those reserves are gone, what was a living branch is a dead stick.

Jesus’s point is not primarily about the danger of being cut off — though that danger is real and the warning is serious. His primary point is about the nature of the relationship between the branch and the vine when that relationship is intact. The branch does not struggle to produce fruit. The branch does not have a fruit-production strategy or a fruit-improvement plan. The branch simply remains connected to the vine, and fruit is the natural, inevitable consequence of that connection.

The sap that flows from the vine through the branch is the life of the vine itself, expressed through the particular form and character of the branch. The branch does not contribute the sap. The branch contributes the form — the particular shape, location, and character through which the vine’s life is expressed in this particular time and place.

This is the picture of union. Not the dissolution of the branch into the vine. Not the branch straining to produce fruit through its own effort. The branch remaining — abiding, staying, not leaving — and the life of the vine doing through the branch what the branch could never do from its own resources.

*“You are not the vine. You are not the source. You are the branch — and the glory of the branch is not its independence but its connection. The branch that knows it is a branch is the branch that bears fruit.”*

**— Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ**

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### **Section 2.3 — Union and Identity: Who You Actually Are**

*“For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” — Colossians 3:3–4 (NASB)*

## **Identity is the most fundamental question a human being can ask.**

Not because it is fashionable — though it happens to be fashionable in the current cultural moment — but because everything else flows from it. How you respond to failure, how you navigate conflict, how you face what frightens you, whether you can receive love and whether you can give it — all of it is downstream from how you answer the question: who am I, at the deepest level?

The gospel gives a specific, revolutionary answer to this question. And the revolution is not primarily in the behavior the gospel requires. It is in the identity the gospel confers.

### **The Identity Revolution: Saints Who Still Struggle**

There is a phrase that functions, in too many Christian communities, as a statement of appropriate humility: “I’m just a sinner saved by grace.” The intent behind this phrase is good — a recognition that salvation is entirely God’s gift, not human achievement, and that the person speaking is not claiming moral superiority over anyone.

But the theology embedded in the phrase is incomplete at best and, at its worst, actively destructive to the kind of transformation it is trying to honor.

Because the New Testament does not describe the believer primarily as a sinner. It describes the believer primarily as a saint.

Not in the sense of someone who has achieved moral perfection — the New Testament saints are people with specific, named, serious failures. Peter denied Christ three times. Paul had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas so serious that they parted ways. The Corinthian church had divisions, sexual immorality, and people getting drunk at the Lord’s Supper. The saints of the New Testament are not morally flawless people. They are people who have received the Spirit of the living God and are being transformed by his indwelling presence.

Paul’s consistent habit in his letters is to address his recipients as “the saints” — the holy ones, the set-apart ones, the ones whose identity has been redefined by their union with Christ — and then deal with the failures that are inconsistent with that identity. He does not say: you are sinners, therefore stop sinning. He says: you are saints, therefore act like it. The identity is the foundation. The behavior is the appropriate expression of the identity.

The difference is enormous. A sinner trying to stop sinning is fighting against their nature. A saint who still struggles with sin is growing into their nature. One is trying to become something they are not. The other is learning to live from what they already are.

*“The saint is not a person who has become good but a person who has received the life of Another.”*

**— Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest**

Chambers cuts to the center of it. Sainthood, in the New Testament sense, is not a moral achievement. It is a reception. It is the reception of the life of the indwelling Christ, which then becomes the ground and source of the transformation that the moral categories are trying to describe. You do not become a saint by becoming good. You discover that you are a saint — because the One who is holy has taken up residence in you — and that discovery is what makes genuine transformation possible.

**Hidden with Christ in God: The Security of Union**

The identity the gospel confers is not only new. It is secured. It is not dependent on your performance, your consistency, your ability to maintain it. It is hidden.

The word Paul uses in Colossians 3:3 — *kekruptai*, “hidden” — is perfect passive again, as in Galatians 2:20. Completed action with ongoing effects. At some point in the past, your life was hidden with Christ in God, and it has been hidden there ever since and remains hidden there right now. The hiding is not something you do. It is something that was done to you, for you, on your behalf.

Think about what it means for something to be hidden with Christ in God. It is not merely put away somewhere safe. It is located within the most secure location in the universe — within the person of Christ, who is himself within the life of God. Your identity, your new self, your truest life — all of it is sheltered within a union that nothing in heaven or earth or the depths of hell can penetrate.

This means your identity cannot be taken from you by circumstances. It cannot be revoked by failure. It cannot be eroded by the slow accumulation of disappointment and loss. The self that God has made you in Christ is not at risk from what happens to you in the world, because it does not live in the world. It lives hidden with Christ in God.

Now — this does not mean the feelings of insecurity or failure or shame are not real. They are very real, and denying them in the name of theological correctness is neither honest nor helpful. What it means is that those feelings, as real as they are, are not the final word about who you are. They are telling you about your emotional state. They are not telling you about your identity. And the discipline of the indwelling life is, in part, the practice of returning to what is true when your feelings are telling you something else.

*“The great danger of the spiritual life is not that we will lose our identity in Christ but that we will forget it is there — that we will live as though our shame is more real than our union, as*

*though our failures are more final than our hidden life.”*

— **Henri Nouwen, Life of the Beloved**

### **Not Sinners Trying to Be Saints — Saints Learning to Live Like It**

Here is the practical pastoral consequence of everything we have been examining in this section:

The Christian life is not the project of turning sinners into saints. It is the project of helping saints discover and live from what they already are.

This is not semantic wordplay. It changes the entire posture of spiritual formation. When the primary identity is “sinner” — even “sinner saved by grace” — the spiritual life is fundamentally a project of overcoming your nature. You are, at the core, a sinful person who has been forgiven, and the work of sanctification is the long, difficult work of replacing your sinful nature with something better.

When the primary identity is “saint” — a person in whom Christ dwells, whose life is hidden with Christ in God, who is already in possession of everything needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) — the spiritual life is fundamentally a project of growing into your nature. You are, at the core, a beloved child of God, indwelt by his Spirit, already possessing everything required for the life God intends. The work of sanctification is not acquiring what you lack. It is learning to live from what you already have.

The transformation is real either way. The struggle is real either way. The failures are real either way. But the ground from which you face the struggle is entirely different. And the ground matters. It matters whether you stand in the open field under the judgment of a standard you cannot reach, or whether you stand in the shelter of a union that has already secured your identity and is already at work transforming you from within.

*“Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.” — 2*

**Peter 1:3 (NASB)**

Everything pertaining to life and godliness. Not some things. Not the starting materials from which you must build what is lacking. Everything. The grant has already been made. The inheritance is already deposited. The indwelling One has already brought everything he is into the space of everything you are. The question is not whether you have enough. The question is whether you know what you have.

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## **Section 2.4 — For the First Responder: Identity Under Fire**

**There is a particular crucible in which the question of identity is tested with an intensity that most people will never experience.**

It is the crucible of a job that asks you to function at your best in the worst moments of other people's lives. To be professional, competent, emotionally regulated, and effective when the scene is chaos, the stakes are life and death, and every instinct you have is screaming at you in a register that adrenaline and cortisol have tuned to maximum volume.

First responders — firefighters, police officers, paramedics, emergency dispatchers, emergency room personnel, military personnel in combat roles — know something about identity that most people only encounter in theory. They know that in the moment of crisis, you do not have time to figure out who you are. You have to already know. The identity that carries you into the worst scenario is not assembled on the way there. It is formed before you ever arrive.

### **The Bell Hits: Identity Determines Response**

Every firefighter who has served in a working company knows the particular quality of the moment the tones drop. The alarm. The address. The type of call. And then the immediate, wordless mobilization of everything you are toward the task.

In that moment, nobody asks whether they are a firefighter. The question is settled. The identity is already formed, already internalized, already operative. What flows from the identity — the gear going on, the rig moving, the mind beginning to think tactically — flows from a settled answer to a question that was answered long before this moment.

A person who is uncertain about their identity in the moment of crisis is dangerous. Not just to themselves but to everyone around them. Identity uncertainty under pressure produces hesitation, inconsistency, role confusion, and the kind of decision-making that gets people killed. The formation programs of every branch of emergency services understand this at a deep, operational level. You are not trained primarily in techniques. You are trained in an identity. "I am a firefighter. This is what firefighters do. This is how firefighters think. This is what firefighters do not do." The technique flows from the identity, not the other way around.

### **The Deeper Identity: Christ-Indwelt**

Now carry this understanding into the territory of the spiritual life, and specifically into the question this chapter has been building toward.

If your operating identity is “sinner saved by grace” — if the most fundamental thing you believe about yourself is that you are, at the core, a moral failure who has been given a stay of execution — what happens when the bell hits? Not the tones in the bay. The tones of daily life. The impossible situation. The moment of moral pressure. The colleague who makes the choice that compromises everyone, and you have to decide in the next thirty seconds whether you go along with it. The patient who is becoming violent and the temptation to respond in kind. The marriage that is eroding under the pressure of a job that takes everything you have, and there is nothing left at the end of the shift. The darkness that settles in after the bad call, the one that will not leave, the one that the psych debrief did not touch.

The sinner-identity does not give you adequate ground to stand on in those moments. It tells you that you are, fundamentally, the kind of person who does the wrong thing — and that your job is to resist your nature through willpower. And willpower, under sufficient pressure, eventually yields. Every first responder knows this. The people who make the bad choices under pressure are not, usually, bad people. They are people whose identity was insufficient for the moment they found themselves in.

But the Christ-indwelt identity is a different kind of ground entirely.

When your deepest, most operational, most practically functional sense of who you are is “I am a person in whom Christ lives” — when that is as settled and as immediately available as the knowledge that you are a firefighter when the tones drop — the response in the moment of pressure is different. Not because you are trying harder. Not because the situation is less difficult. But because the identity from which you are responding is already connected to the One who has all the resources the situation requires.

*“The person who knows who they are in Christ does not have to construct a response to crisis from scratch. They draw from a source that was established before the crisis arrived.”*

— **Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel**

### **The Wounds That Accumulate**

There is a second dimension of first responder experience that the identity of union directly addresses, and it is the one that tends to surface not in the acute crisis but in the long aftermath.

The acute call is manageable for most experienced responders, at least in the short term. The training takes over. The identity holds. But what about the accumulation? The hundred bad calls over ten years. The pediatric codes. The suicides. The domestics that never change because the system that is supposed to help keeps sending you back to the same

address. The partner who didn't make it. The career-ending injury. The marriage that didn't survive the job.

Over time, the accumulation of trauma produces a specific kind of identity erosion. Not a sudden crisis of faith but a slow wearing away of the self — a dulling of the capacity for joy, a gradual replacement of idealism with cynicism, a diminishment of the person who showed up on the first day of the academy with a clear and hopeful sense of who they were and why they were doing this.

This is the wound that the identity of union was specifically designed to address. Not because it makes the wounds disappear. Not because faith is a shortcut through grief and trauma. But because the identity that is hidden with Christ in God is not susceptible to the erosion that the world produces. It can be forgotten. It can be obscured by layers of damage and loss and the accumulated weight of a hard life. But it cannot be destroyed.

The work of pastoral care and chaplaincy for first responders, at its deepest level, is the work of helping people who have forgotten who they are to remember. Not to perform better. Not to manage their symptoms more effectively. To return to the ground — the hidden, secured, indwelling-Christ ground — from which a genuinely sustained and genuinely transforming life can be lived.

*“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” —*

**Romans 8:38–39 (NASB)**

Paul wrote this from inside his own experience of a life that had cost him everything. He was not writing theoretical theology from a comfortable distance. He was writing hard-won pastoral wisdom from the inside of suffering, failure, imprisonment, betrayal, and loss. And what he had found, in the middle of all of it, was that the union — the one-spirit union of 1 Corinthians 6:17, the hidden-with-Christ-in-God security of Colossians 3:3 — held. Not occasionally. Consistently. Absolutely.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Not the worst call you ever ran. Not the darkest night you ever sat through. Not the failure you are most ashamed of. Not the distance you feel right now between yourself and the God you once knew. The union holds. The identity is secured. The indwelling Christ is still in the same place he was when you first believed — inside you, not because of your performance, but because of his faithfulness.

This is the ground. This is the identity that holds when the bell hits and when the bell doesn't stop ringing for years. This is the truth that makes every other truth in this book possible.

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### **The House Is Larger Than the Foyer**

**Forgiveness is the most beautiful word in any human language.**

The moment a person genuinely receives it — really receives it, not just intellectually acknowledges it but feels the weight of guilt lifted and replaced with the lightness of pardon — something happens that cannot be fully described. The ledger that was against you has been cleared. The verdict has been overturned. The debt has been cancelled. This is real, and it is glorious, and no one who has truly experienced it would trade it for anything.

But forgiveness is the door, not the house. It is the beginning, not the end. It is the entry into a reality so much larger than itself that to stop at forgiveness and go no further is to stand in the doorway of a mansion while the rooms prepared for you stretch, unvisited, in every direction.

Union is the house. The one-spirit union of 1 Corinthians 6:17. The in-Christ reality of 164 New Testament passages. The hidden-with-Christ-in-God security of Colossians 3:3. The vine and the branch. The saint who has received the life of Another. The first responder whose deepest identity is not shaped by the accumulation of what the job has done to them but by the indwelling One who is doing something else entirely — something that cannot be erased, cannot be exhausted, cannot be taken away.

The next chapter will press deeper into the scope of what this means — into who, exactly, the Christ is who has taken up residence in you. Because before you can fully live from the indwelling, you need to have your mind fully enlarged by who it is that dwells.

But before we get there: the foyer is not your home. It was never meant to be. The whole house is yours. And the One who lives in you is the One who built it.

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## Reflection Questions

These questions are meant to be lived with, not answered quickly. Sit with the ones that create the most resistance — those are usually the ones with the most to offer.

- Have you primarily understood salvation as forgiveness, or as union? Be honest rather than theologically correct. What has your lived experience of the Christian life most closely resembled — the anteroom or the house?
- What difference would the fuller understanding of union make in your most difficult current situation? Name the situation specifically and ask: what would it mean to face this from the ground of union rather than from the ground of performance?
- In what area of your life are you still living as a condemned sinner rather than a beloved child? Where does the shame run deepest? How does the security of “hidden with Christ in God” speak to that specific place?
- For first responders and those in high-stress vocations: How has the accumulation of your work shaped your sense of who you are? What would it mean for your identity to be grounded in the indwelling Christ rather than in the sum of your experiences on the job?
- The chapter argues that you are a saint who still struggles with sin, not a sinner trying to become a saint. Does that feel true? Where does it feel most difficult to believe? What would change if you believed it consistently?

*“But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” — 1 Corinthians 6:17 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT I • CHAPTER THREE

#### The Fullness of Him

*Understanding the Scope of Christ's Life Within*

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” — Colossians 1:15–17 (NASB)*

**There is a disease of the imagination that may be more damaging to the spiritual life than any outright theological error.**

It is the disease of the small Christ.

It does not announce itself with heretical propositions. It does not require the rejection of any creed. A person can affirm every word of the Apostles' Creed, correctly answer every question on a seminary entrance exam, and still be in its grip. Because the disease of the small Christ is not primarily a doctrinal failure. It is an imaginative one. It is the condition of having a picture of Jesus that is, in practice, too small — too local, too tame, too narrowly useful, too easily managed — to produce the kind of transformation the indwelling of this particular Christ is capable of producing.

Ask the average sincere believer what the Christ who lives in them is like, and listen carefully to the picture that emerges. It is likely to be a Jesus who helps with personal struggles, who is available in prayer, who provides comfort in difficulty and moral guidance in ethical complexity. A Jesus who is, in essence, a very helpful personal presence — kind, reliable, spiritually sophisticated in the way that a wise counselor is spiritually sophisticated, but operating at essentially human scale.

This is not the Christ of Colossians 1.

The Christ of Colossians 1 is the one in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. The one through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together. The image of the invisible God, the firstborn from the dead, the head over all rule and authority. He is not a helpful presence operating at human scale. He is the Lord of the cosmos who

has condescended to take up residence in human beings — which means that when he dwells in you, he does not downsize. He brings the full scope of who he is into the full particularity of who you are.

The purpose of this chapter is to cure the disease of the small Christ by sitting with the full Colossian portrait of the One who indwells us. Because you cannot live from a Christ you have not yet fully seen. And the Christ most of us have seen is a fraction of the one the New Testament presents.

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### **Section 3.1 — The Colossian Hymn: Who Christ Is**

**The opening movement of Paul’s letter to the Colossians contains what many scholars consider the most exalted portrait of Christ in all of Christian Scripture.**

It is often called a hymn because of its rhythmic structure, its elevated diction, and its liturgical quality — many scholars believe Paul may be quoting or adapting an early Christian hymn that was already circulating in the worship life of the young churches. Whether original composition or quotation, it is among the most carefully constructed and theologically dense passages in the entire New Testament.

And it is the foundation on which everything else in Colossians rests. Paul does not begin with the practical problems in the Colossian church — the false teaching, the religious observances, the cosmic speculation that was destabilizing the community. He begins here. With the full, towering, earth-shaking scope of who Christ is. Because until you know who Christ is, you cannot understand what it means that he dwells in you. And until you understand what it means that he dwells in you, you cannot understand why the false teaching that was circulating in Colossae was not just wrong but tragically, unnecessarily diminishing.

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” — Colossians 1:15–20 (NASB)*

Let us move through this passage claim by claim, because each one carries weight that casual reading tends to collapse. Paul is not offering a list of impressive attributes. He is constructing a portrait in which each statement builds on and deepens the ones before it — until the cumulative effect is something that, if genuinely absorbed, permanently alters the scale at which you understand the One who dwells in you.

### **Image of the Invisible God**

The Greek word Paul uses is *eikon* — the word from which we get the English “icon.” An *eikon* is not a symbol or a representation from a distance. In Greek usage, an *eikon* participates in the reality it depicts. It is the visible, tangible, accessible form of something that is otherwise invisible and inaccessible.

When Paul says Christ is the image of the invisible God, he is not saying that Christ reminds us of God, or that Christ is a useful pointer toward God, or that in Christ we get a partial or approximate idea of what God is like. He is saying that Christ is the full, unedited, uncompromised rendering of the invisible God in visible, tangible, human form. To see Christ is to see the Father (John 14:9). Not a representation of the Father. The Father himself, made accessible in the Son.

This claim is not incidental to the hymn. It is the premise from which everything else follows. If Christ is the image of the invisible God — if the full reality of God is present and accessible in him — then everything else Paul says about Christ is simultaneously a statement about God. The cosmic creator, the one in whom all things hold together, the firstborn from the dead — this is who God is. This is what God is like. And this is the One who has taken up residence in you.

*“The Incarnation is not God sending a representative. It is God showing up. Christ is not the image of God in the sense that a photograph is the image of a person. He is the image of God in the sense that a person’s face is the image of their soul — the full, unmediated, irreducible presence.”*

— Karl Barth, **Church Dogmatics**

### **Firstborn of All Creation**

This phrase has been misread throughout church history as a statement about Christ’s origin — that he was the first thing God made. The Arian controversy of the fourth century turned precisely on this misreading, and the Council of Nicaea was convened, in part, to address it definitively.

Paul is not saying Christ was created. The word firstborn (*prototokos* in Greek) in its Old Testament context — and Paul is drawing heavily on Old Testament categories throughout

this hymn — is a term of rank and primacy, not chronological sequence. The firstborn son in the ancient Near East was the heir, the one with preeminence, the one to whom the inheritance and the authority of the family belonged. David is called God’s firstborn in Psalm 89:27 — not because David was the first person born, but because God had appointed him to the position of supreme dignity and authority.

Christ is the firstborn of all creation in the sense that he holds primacy over all creation, that he is the rightful heir and Lord of everything that exists. The cosmos is not his context — it is his domain. He does not inhabit the universe. He is its Lord.

### **In Him All Things Were Created**

Paul’s next claim escalates dramatically. Not merely does Christ hold primacy over creation — he is the agent of its existence. All things were created through him and for him. The preposition *dia* (“through”) identifies him as the active agent of the creation event. The preposition *eis* (“for”) identifies him as the goal, the purpose, the *telos* toward which all of creation moves.

Paul is careful to specify the scope: both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. This is not a general claim about material creation. It is a comprehensive claim that includes the invisible spiritual realm as well as the visible physical one. The powers and authorities that the Colossian false teachers were apparently encouraging the congregation to venerate and appease — the angelic intermediaries, the cosmic forces — were themselves created through Christ and for Christ. They are not rivals to his lordship. They are subordinate to it.

For a congregation being drawn toward the worship of spiritual intermediaries, this is not a minor point. And for believers today who live under the pressure of forces that feel overwhelming — systemic evil, structural injustice, the spiritual darkness that seems to govern certain places and certain lives — it is equally significant. The One who dwells in you created every power that oppresses you. He is not intimidated by any of them. And they are all subordinate to the Lord who has made his home in human hearts.

### **In Him All Things Hold Together**

This may be the single most staggering claim in the entire hymn, and it is worth pausing long enough to feel its full weight.

The Greek word translated “hold together” is *synesteken* — from *synistemi*, meaning to cohere, to be constituted, to maintain structural integrity. Paul is saying that the coherence of the physical universe — the fact that atoms maintain their structure, that gravity functions consistently, that the laws of physics are laws rather than suggestions, that the

created order holds its shape from moment to moment — is not an intrinsic property of matter. It is a function of Christ’s ongoing, active, present sustaining work.

Remove Christ from the equation and the universe does not simply deteriorate. It loses the principle of its coherence. It comes apart at the seams. The same One who created all things is the One in whom all things maintain their existence.

This is not an abstract cosmological claim. It is an intensely pastoral one. Because the One who is currently holding the atoms of your body in their proper configuration, who is maintaining the coherence of the very neurons firing as you read these words, is the same One who has taken up residence in you as a Person, as an indwelling Presence, as the hope of glory.

*“The Colossian hymn is the most exalted portrait of Christ in all of Scripture. And then Paul says: this Christ is in you. If that does not astonish us, we have not yet heard it.”*

— **N.T. Wright, Colossians and Philemon**

### **Firstborn from the Dead**

The hymn now pivots from the cosmic to the historical — from creation to new creation, from the beginning to the eschatological breakthrough. Christ is the firstborn from the dead: the first human being to pass through death and emerge on the other side not as a resuscitated corpse but as a genuinely transformed, glorified, immortal human being.

The resurrection is not merely the reversal of the crucifixion. It is the inauguration of a new order of existence. In the resurrection of Jesus, the future of creation — the ultimate transformation, the redemption of the body, the renewal of all things — broke into the present. The firstborn from the dead is the guarantee and the foretaste of what is coming for all who are in him.

And he is in you. Which means the life that defeated death — the resurrection life, the life of the new creation — is the life that is at work in you right now, from the inside out, from the center of your being outward into the whole of your existence. The first responder who runs into a burning building carries, in their person, the life of the one who conquered the grave. The recovering addict who refuses the substance for one more day carries, in the interior of their struggle, the power of the resurrection. This is not metaphor. This is the claim of the New Testament.

### **All the Fullness Was Pleased to Dwell in Him**

The hymn closes with a claim that directly prepares the ground for Colossians 2:9–10 and the section that follows. It was the Father’s good pleasure — eudokesen, a word expressing delight and intentional choice — for all the fullness (pan to pleroma) to dwell in Christ.

Pleroma was a technical term in the religious vocabulary of the first-century world. Various philosophical and religious systems used it to describe the totality of divine being, the sum of all heavenly powers and attributes. The false teachers in Colossae were apparently using some version of this language to describe a cosmic hierarchy of divine intermediaries — a chain of pleroma distributed among various spiritual powers, each with its own domain and its own requirements for approach.

Paul's response is categorical: the pleroma is not distributed. It is concentrated. All of it, in Christ. Not a portion. Not a representative sample. All the fullness of the divine being, dwelling in one Person — and, as Colossians 2:9–10 will make explicit, that same fullness made available to every believer through union with him.

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### **Section 3.2 — 'All the Fullness of Deity Dwells' in Christ**

*"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."* — **Colossians 2:9–10 (NASB)**

**Colossians 2:9–10 is the culmination of everything the hymn in chapter 1 was building toward, and it deserves to be read in two movements.**

The first movement is about Christ: in him all the fullness of Deity — theotes, not merely theiotes (divine qualities) but the full substance of what it means to be God — dwells in bodily form. This is Paul's most concentrated statement of what the Incarnation accomplished. The eternal Son did not partially take on human form. He did not leave a portion of his deity behind in heaven while a reduced version occupied the body of Jesus of Nazareth. He brought everything he is into the full particularity of human flesh. God in a body. The pleroma in person.

The second movement is the pastoral consequence: and in him you have been made complete. The Greek word is *pepleroōmenoi* — the perfect passive participle of the same root as pleroma. You have been filled up, you have been brought to fullness, you have been made complete. The same word family that described the fullness of God dwelling in Christ now describes what has happened to the believer in union with Christ.

The connection is explicit and intentional. The fullness of God dwells in Christ. You are in Christ. Therefore, through your union with the One in whom the fullness dwells, you have been made complete.

### **You Do Not Have a Partial Christ**

This is the pastoral implication that the small-Christ disease most needs to hear.

When you received Christ, you did not receive a starter kit. You did not receive a portion of his grace, a sample of his power, an introductory offer that can be upgraded with sufficient spiritual effort. You received him — the whole Christ, the cosmic Lord, the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all things hold together, the one in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.

You do not have a Jesus-lite. You have the Jesus of the Colossian hymn. And he has not downsized his indwelling to fit within the modest dimensions of your self-assessment. He has brought his full self — his full power, his full wisdom, his full love, his full authority over every principality and power — into the interior of your ordinary human life.

This means that when Paul says you have been made complete, he is not describing an aspiration. He is describing your current status. Not your felt experience, necessarily. Not your consistent performance. Your status before God, in Christ, right now. The completeness is not something you are working toward. It has already been accomplished by virtue of your union with the One who is complete.

*“The believer who understands Colossians 2:10 does not spend their life acquiring what they lack. They spend their life learning to live from what they already have.”*

— **F.F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians**

### **Completeness as Gift, Not Achievement**

The temptation to resist this is powerful, because it runs directly against the grain of every natural human instinct about how valuable things are obtained.

Everything in our experience tells us that completeness — maturity, wholeness, the full expression of what a person is capable of — is the result of effort, discipline, time, and accumulated wisdom. You become a skilled craftsman by years of practice. You become an experienced responder by running thousands of calls. You become a wise parent by navigating years of actual parenting. Completeness, in the ordinary human register, is earned.

The gospel inverts this completely. The completeness Paul announces in Colossians 2:10 is not earned. It is received. It is not the outcome of spiritual discipline, though spiritual discipline matters enormously in learning to live from the completeness that has been given. It is the beginning point — the ground from which the spiritual life is lived, not the destination toward which it is aimed.

The craftsman who knows his tools are adequate does not spend his energy anxiously wondering whether he has the right instruments. He picks them up and does the work. The believer who knows they have been made complete in Christ does not spend their energy

anxiously striving to acquire what they feel they lack. They draw on what they have been given and discover, in the drawing, that it is more than sufficient.

*“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” —*  
**Philippians 4:19 (NASB)**

Paul’s confidence in this promise was not theoretical. He wrote it from prison, after a life of extraordinary suffering, having been beaten and imprisoned and shipwrecked and abandoned. And his testimony was not that God had occasionally supplemented his resources in moments of extreme need. His testimony was that the riches in glory in Christ Jesus — the pleroma, the fullness — were the inexhaustible source from which every need, in every moment, was met. Not some needs. All needs. Not occasionally. Always.

### **He Is the Head Over All Rule and Authority**

Paul adds a final phrase to Colossians 2:10 that is easy to read past but carries enormous weight for the practical Christian life: he is the head over all rule and authority.

The false teachers in Colossae were apparently suggesting that believers needed to supplement their relationship with Christ by also attending to the cosmic powers — the thrones and dominions and rulers and authorities that the ancient world understood to be governing various aspects of existence. Perhaps Christ was not sufficient on his own. Perhaps additional spiritual intermediaries needed to be appeased or accessed.

Paul’s answer is not a polite suggestion that Christ is adequate. It is a categorical declaration that Christ is head over every power that exists — which means that when you are in union with Christ, you are already connected to the source of authority over every spiritual, physical, psychological, and circumstantial force that could be arrayed against you.

You do not need additional mediators. You do not need to supplement the indwelling Christ with other spiritual resources. The One who indwells you is the head over every rule and authority in the cosmos. There is no power above him, no circumstance beyond his authority, no darkness that has not already been addressed by his cross and resurrection.

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### **Section 3.3 — Why We Settle for Less**

**The pastoral mystery at the center of this chapter is not theological. It is experiential.**

The theology is, in one sense, straightforward. The Colossian hymn is not obscure. Colossians 2:9–10 is not difficult to translate or interpret. The indwelling of the cosmic Christ is announced clearly, repeatedly, and emphatically throughout the New Testament.

If you ask the average church-attending believer whether Christ is adequate, whether his indwelling is real, whether the completeness Paul announces is theologically true, the vast majority will say yes without hesitation.

And then they will walk out of the church building and live as though none of it is true.

This is the mystery. Not the doctrine. The gap between the doctrine and the experience. Why do believers who could tell you, accurately and at length, that Christ is the cosmic Lord, the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells — why do those same believers live diminished, anxious, self-managed, resources-always-running-low lives?

The answer is not primarily intellectual. It is habitual.

### **The Default Setting: Self-Management**

Every human being who has lived any significant portion of their life before coming to faith has spent years, often decades, developing a sophisticated system of self-management. You learn what you are capable of and what you are not. You learn which situations you can navigate and which you cannot. You develop strategies — conscious and unconscious, healthy and unhealthy — for managing the inevitable gap between what life requires of you and what you have available.

When you come to faith, the indwelling Christ does not instantly replace this system. He does not, in a single moment of conversion, rewire the neural pathways that have been running your interior life for twenty or thirty or fifty years. The system is still there. The habits of self-reliance, self-protection, self-management are still the default setting that activates under pressure.

This is not a failure of conversion. It is a description of how formation works. The self-management system was built slowly, through repetition and reinforcement, over a long period of time. It is not dismantled in a moment. It is displaced gradually, through the equally slow and repetitive process of choosing, again and again, to return attention to the indwelling Presence rather than activating the default system.

The technical term for this process is sanctification. The popular term is “the Christian life.” And the reason it is often experienced as difficult is not that the resources are inadequate. It is that the old system is deeply grooved and the new practice of living from the indwelling Christ is still relatively shallow.

*“The Holy Spirit is treated as the Cinderella of the Trinity — acknowledged in the abstract but not invited to the ball, not welcomed into the actual functioning of daily life, not trusted*

*with the management of real affairs.”*

— **A.W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest***

Tozer’s image applies equally to the indwelling Christ. He is acknowledged. He is affirmed in creed and song. He is invited into the ceremonial occasions — the Sunday morning, the crisis moment, the bedside prayer. But the actual management of daily life — the decisions, the reactions, the emotional responses, the allocation of energy and attention — is conducted from the self-management system that was in place before he arrived. He has been given the guest bedroom. The household is still being run from the old control center.

### **The Problem of Inattention**

There is a second factor that compounds the first, and it is what we might call the problem of inattention.

The indwelling Christ does not force himself on the believer’s attention. He does not interrupt your day with mandatory appearances. He does not override your habits and compel you to live from his resources against your will. The union is real and permanent. The fullness is genuinely present. But the experience of drawing on the fullness — the practical, daily, moment-by-moment reality of living from the indwelling Christ rather than from the self-management system — requires attention.

And attention is precisely what the contemporary world is engineered to prevent.

The noise is constant. The demands are relentless. The devices in our pockets are designed, at enormous expense and by the most sophisticated behavioral psychologists money can hire, to capture and hold our attention for commercial purposes. The result is a generation of human beings — believers and unbelievers alike — who have lost the capacity for the sustained interior attention that living from the indwelling Christ requires.

Brother Lawrence, who practiced the presence of God in a seventeenth-century monastery kitchen, found that the primary obstacle was not theological confusion but simple inattention — the constant tendency of the mind to drift away from the awareness of the indwelling Presence and back toward whatever was immediately demanding its notice. His great contribution was not a technique but a commitment: to return, again and again, without guilt or drama, to the awareness of the One who was always already present.

*“The practice of the presence of God is nothing more and nothing less than this: the determination to return your attention, as often as it wanders, to the One who is always and already here.”*

— **Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God***

## **The Lure of the Manageable**

There is a third factor, subtler than the first two, that keeps believers living beneath the fullness that is available to them: the lure of the manageable.

The small Christ is, in one sense, more comfortable than the cosmic Christ. A Jesus who helps with church things and moral struggles and personal emergencies is a Jesus who can be accommodated within a life that is fundamentally organized around self-management. You bring him in for the things you cannot handle. You handle the rest yourself. The arrangement is orderly. The boundaries are clear. The demands are negotiable.

The cosmic Christ of Colossians 1 is not manageable. The One in whom all things hold together cannot be confined to the “religious” department of your life without the confinement itself becoming a kind of unbelief. He is either Lord of all or he is not the Christ of Colossians — and if he is Lord of all, then every department of your life, every relationship, every decision, every hour of every day, is simultaneously his domain and his workshop.

This is both the most liberating and the most unsettling truth in the Christian life. Liberating because it means you are never without resources, never outside the reach of the One who holds all things together. Unsettling because it means nothing is exempt, nothing is private, nothing is yours to manage independently. Every part of the house is his.

Many believers unconsciously negotiate this down to something smaller because the full scope of the cosmic Christ’s lordship over their lives is genuinely difficult to accept. The small Christ is, in a specific and uncomfortable sense, more convenient. And the church, too often, has been willing to offer the convenient version rather than the true one.

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### **Section 3.4 — The Furniture Shop Meditation**

**There is a piece of furniture in the back of the shop that nobody has touched in years.**

You can see, even through the damage, that it was once something significant. The proportions are right — the lines have the kind of quiet elegance that marks genuine craftsmanship rather than the hasty production of the assembly line. But layers of paint, applied over decades and over each other, have obscured the original surface entirely. Somewhere under all of it is the wood the maker intended — the grain, the figure, the particular beauty of this particular tree in this particular moment of its life. But it has been so thoroughly buried by the accumulation of what other hands applied to it that the original is invisible.

The damage goes deeper than the paint. There are gouges in the surface, wounds that the paint was originally applied to conceal. There are places where the joints have failed, where the structure that holds the piece together has been compromised by time and stress and the weight of what it has been asked to carry. The piece is not simply cosmetically damaged. It has been structurally weakened by what life has done to it.

A skilled restorer does not look at this piece and see what it has become.

They see what it was always meant to be.

### **The Restorer's Eye**

The first act of restoration is not sanding or stripping or repairing joints. It is seeing. The restorer must look through the layers of damage and accumulated covering to perceive the original intention of the maker — the grain that is waiting to be revealed, the proportions that have been obscured but not destroyed, the structural integrity that can be recovered if the damage is addressed from the right direction.

This seeing is not optimism. It is not the restorer projecting their wishes onto a damaged object. It is a trained perception — the ability, developed through years of working with wood and with damage, to distinguish between what has been added and what is original, between what can be removed and what must be preserved, between what is damage and what is grain.

Christ looks at a human being the way a master restorer looks at a damaged piece. Not at what the person has become through the accumulation of damage, sin, bad theology, trauma, and the wearing effects of a hard life. At what God always intended. At the grain and beauty and structural integrity that was built into the person at creation and that no amount of damage has destroyed, only buried.

The work of the indwelling Christ is not replacement. It is restoration. He is not dismantling who you are and substituting something else. He is working — patiently, skillfully, from the inside out — to reveal what was always there. The image of God that was stamped into the original design of your humanity, obscured but not obliterated by the Fall and by everything the Fall has produced in your specific life.

*“God does not love us despite what we are. He loves us toward what we were always meant to be. The indwelling Christ is not the replacement of the human person but the recovery of the human person — the patient, inside-out work of restoring the image.”*

— **C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory**

## **Stripping: The Necessary Pain**

Anyone who has done furniture restoration knows that the stripping process is not pleasant for the piece. The chemicals that remove decades of accumulated paint are not gentle. The sanding that reveals the grain beneath removes material that has become, in some sense, part of the surface — even if it was never part of the original.

The spiritual equivalent of stripping is what the tradition has called mortification, or what Paul calls co-crucifixion, or what Jesus describes when he talks about losing your life in order to find it. It is the often uncomfortable process of having what is not original — the false self, the ego-defenses, the self-management strategies, the religious performance, the accumulated layers of what we have applied to ourselves to conceal the damage — removed.

This process is not punitive. It is restorative. The stripping is not the restorer expressing contempt for the piece. It is the restorer working toward the grain. The discomfort is real, but it is in the service of something more beautiful than what it is removing.

The indwelling Christ does this work from the inside out. He does not strip you down from the exterior — though life often provides exterior pressures that serve the same function. He works from within, loosening the grip of what does not belong so that what was always there can gradually emerge. This is why the spiritual life, in its most honest expressions, tends to feel simultaneously like loss and discovery — like having things taken and finding, in their absence, something far more valuable.

## **Repair: Structural Work Before Surface Work**

Any skilled restorer will tell you: surface work before structural work is a mistake. The most beautiful finish in the world is meaningless if the joints are failing and the piece cannot bear weight. You must repair the structure before you address the surface.

The indwelling Christ prioritizes structural repair. This is why the spiritual formation process so often addresses the deep interior architecture — identity, attachment, the deep-seated patterns of relating to God and to other people — before it produces the visible surface changes that other people notice. The work that is happening in the hidden places, in the joints that nobody sees, is the work that makes the visible transformation possible and sustainable.

This is particularly important for people whose damage is deep — those whose formation has been significantly shaped by trauma, by spiritual abuse, by the accumulated weight of a vocation like first response that extracts a specific structural cost over time. The indwelling Christ is not deterred by the depth of the damage. The most skilled restorers are

not discouraged by the most damaged pieces. If anything, the challenge of the deeply damaged piece is what calls forth the fullest expression of the restorer's art.

### **The Reveal: What Was Always There**

The moment that every restorer works toward is the moment the grain appears.

You have been working for hours, or days, and the wood has been resistant and the process has been painstaking and there have been moments when you wondered whether the grain you thought you saw was really there or whether you were projecting beauty onto an irredeemably damaged surface. And then the light catches it at the right angle and there it is — the figure of the wood, the unique pattern of growth rings and grain that is unlike any other piece of wood that has ever existed, beautiful in a way that was always there but was buried so long that you had almost stopped believing in it.

This is the hope of glory. Not a new creation imposed from the outside. A recovery of the original creation, renewed and completed by the One who made it. The person you were always meant to be — the particular, unrepeatable expression of the image of God that was embedded in your specific humanity at the moment of your creation — emerging from beneath the layers of damage and covering, revealed by the patient, inside-out work of the One who sees the grain when everyone else sees only the damage.

The cosmic Christ — the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells, the One who holds all things together — is the master restorer. And he has taken up residence in you not to replace you but to reveal you. To work in you, from the inside out, until what God always intended when he made you is fully and finally visible.

That is the hope of glory. And it has already begun.

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### **A Christ Worth Living From**

**Movement I of this book has been an extended exercise in enlargement.**

Chapter 1 enlarged our understanding of what the indwelling means — moving from the vague awareness that Christ is somehow present to the specific, theologically grounded, experientially important reality of en hymin: Christ not with you but in you, not nearby but indwelling, not doctrinal status but living Presence.

Chapter 2 enlarged our understanding of what salvation accomplishes — moving from the magnificent but insufficient foyer of forgiveness into the full house of union, from the sinner-identity that produces moralism to the saint-identity that makes genuine transformation possible.

This chapter has enlarged our understanding of who the indwelling One is — pulling back from the small, manageable, domesticated Christ who helps with church things and revealing the cosmic Lord of the Colossian hymn, in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells, in whom all things hold together, before whom every rule and authority must give way.

This Christ is the One who lives in you. Not a portion of him. Not a representative sample. The full Christ, with the full scope of his cosmic authority and the full depth of his intimate love, has made his home in the particular, specific, irreplaceable human being that you are.

The question Movement II will address is the one that arises naturally from this: how do you live from this reality rather than merely believing it? How does the truth of who Christ is — the truth we have been sitting with across these three chapters — reach from the theological register into the Tuesday morning register, into the actual lived texture of your ordinary, difficult, beautiful, broken, redeemable life?

That is the question of surrender. And it begins in the next chapter.

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### **Reflection Questions**

The goal of these questions is not information but enlargement. Let them do the slow work of expanding your picture of the Christ who dwells within you.

- What is your functional picture of the Christ who lives in you? Be honest about the scale. Is the Christ you actually relate to day-to-day the cosmic Lord of the Colossian hymn, or a smaller, more manageable figure? Where did that picture come from?
- What would change in your daily life if you truly grasped that ‘all the fullness of Deity’ dwells in the One who dwells in you? Name one specific situation you are facing right now and ask: what does it mean to face this with the One who holds all things together as my indwelling resource?
- Where have you been trying to manufacture completeness that Christ has already provided? Where is the striving the most intense, and what does that striving reveal about what you believe about the One who lives in you?
- The chapter describes three reasons believers settle for less: the default system of self-management, the problem of inattention, and the lure of the manageable

Christ. Which of these three is most characteristic of your experience? What would addressing it require?

- The furniture restoration metaphor describes the indwelling Christ as a restorer revealing grain that was always there. What do you sense God has been restoring in you? And what layers might still need to be stripped before the grain fully appears?

*“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete.” — Colossians 2:9–10a (NASB)*

## **END OF MOVEMENT I**

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*Movement II — Surrender*

*Learning to Live from the Inside Out*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT II

#### SURRENDER

*Learning to Live from the Inside Out*

*“Grace is not about forgiving what you’ve done. It is about releasing who you are — and discovering who Christ is in you.”*

— Brennan Manning

### MOVEMENT II • CHAPTER FOUR

#### The Death That Gives Life

*Co-Crucifixion and the Way of Surrender*

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” — Galatians 2:20 (NASB)*

**Movement I was about seeing. Movement II is about living.**

We have spent three chapters looking at the full scope of what dwells within us — the mystery of Christ’s indwelling, the union that exceeds mere forgiveness, the cosmic Lord of the Colossian hymn who brings the fullness of the Godhead into the interior of ordinary human life. The theological portrait is as complete and as overwhelming as Paul could make it.

But there is a gap between seeing and living that every honest believer knows. You can hold an accurate, even a magnificent theology of the indwelling Christ and still find yourself, at seven in the morning on a difficult Tuesday, running entirely on your own resources. The information does not automatically become formation. The portrait does not automatically become practice. Something more is required.

That something more is what Paul calls, in the most compressed and most radical spiritual autobiography ever written, co-crucifixion.

The gap between the indwelling Christ and the experienced indwelling Christ is not primarily a knowledge gap. It is a surrender gap. It is the space between the person you were before Christ took up residence — the self-managing, self-defining, self-protecting self that had been running the operation for decades — and the yielded self that has learned to step back and let the indwelling One do what only he can do.

The way across that gap is not effort. It is not discipline, though discipline matters. It is not a more rigorous commitment to the practices of the spiritual life, though practices are essential. The way across the gap is the strange, counterintuitive, entirely grace-structured path that Paul describes in Galatians 2:20: the death that gives life.

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#### **Section 4.1 — Three Verbs That Change Everything**

**Galatians 2:20 is a sentence Paul wrote in the middle of a heated theological argument.**

The context matters. Paul is confronting Peter — publicly, directly, without softening the edges — because Peter has compromised the gospel by withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentile believers when representatives from the Jerusalem church arrived. The issue is not merely social. It is theological: Peter's behavior implies that circumcision and the Law are still required for full standing before God, which means that Christ alone is not sufficient. Which means the gospel is not what Paul has been proclaiming.

In the middle of this confrontation, Paul reaches for the most personally grounded statement he has available. He does not argue from abstract principle. He argues from autobiography. This is what happened to me. This is what the gospel did. This is the reality I am living from. And that reality exposes the inconsistency of what Peter has done.

The three verbs in Galatians 2:20 carry the entire weight of Paul's spiritual life. They are not decorative. They are load-bearing. And they are arranged in a sequence that is both theologically precise and pastorally irreplaceable.

#### **Verb One: I Have Been Crucified**

**I have been crucified with Christ** [*Perfect Passive — completed action with permanent, ongoing effect*]

Something happened, it is finished, and its consequences continue. The old self was put

to death. This is not a process you are still working through. It is an event that occurred at Calvary, applied to you in union with Christ.

The tense Paul uses is the Greek perfect passive: *synestauromai*, “I have been co-crucified.” This is one of the most precisely chosen verb forms in the New Testament, and its precision carries enormous pastoral weight.

The perfect tense in Greek describes a past action whose effects are present and ongoing. It is not simply past — it does not mean “this happened and is now over.” Nor is it simply present — it does not mean “this is happening right now.” It means: this happened, it is complete, and its completion is the permanent condition of the present moment. The state produced by the past action is the current state.

The passive voice tells you who did the acting: not Paul. Paul did not crucify himself. He was co-crucified — included in, united with, incorporated into the crucifixion of Christ by the action of God. In the mystery of union that we explored in Chapter 2, Paul’s old self — the self defined by its relationship to the Law, by its ambition and its religious performance and its self-constructed identity as Saul of Tarsus the Pharisee — was executed when Christ was executed. Not gradually. Not partially. Actually.

This is the objective reality of what happened to every person who has been united to Christ by faith. The old self — the self that was constituted by its independence from God, that drew its identity and its energy from its own resources, that defined itself by its performance and its reputation and its management of its own existence — that self was crucified at Calvary. The execution is complete. The verdict was rendered once, finally, decisively.

The problem is not that the old self survived. The problem is that we do not consistently reckon with the fact that it did not.

*“The old man is not sick. He is not weak. He is not in need of improvement. He is dead. The failure to reckon with his death is the primary reason believers continue to live as though he were still running the operation.”*

— Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*

### **Verb Two: Christ Lives in Me**

**It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me** [*Present Active — continuous, current, unceasing reality*]

This is not a past event or a future hope. It is the present condition. Christ is living, right now, in the interior of the person Paul is. The living is his act, continuous and uninterrupted.

The second verb is present active: ze, “lives.” Not “lived” — past tense, something that happened and may or may not still be operative. Not “will live” — future tense, a hope or a promise for what is to come. Lives. Present. Active. Now.

The contrast Paul establishes is stark: it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The “I” has been displaced as the agent of the living. The old self that was the driver, the manager, the one running the operation — that self is no longer in the driver’s seat. Not because it was improved or rehabilitated, but because it was crucified and replaced by a different agent: the living Christ, present and active in the interior of the human person.

This is the most astonishing claim in the verse, and it is the one most susceptible to being handled abstractly. “Christ lives in me” can become, in the hands of someone who has been hearing it for decades, a pleasant but vague spiritual affirmation — the kind of thing you say without it touching the actual structure of how you live. Paul means something more concrete than that.

He means that the same Christ who walked to Gethsemane in anguish and then yielded to the Father’s will. The same Christ who looked at the rich young ruler with love before speaking the word that cost the man his comfort. The same Christ who turned to the woman caught in adultery and said, “I do not condemn you either” — and then, “Go. From now on sin no more.” The same Christ who wept at Lazarus’s tomb before raising him. That particular, specific, historically embodied Person is the one who is living, right now, in the interior of your life. Not an influence. Not a memory. Not a theological principle. A living Person.

### **Verb Three: I Live by Faith**

**The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God** [*Present Active — the ongoing mode of operation for the yielded self*]

The ‘I’ that remains after co-crucifixion still lives — in a body, in time, in ordinary human experience. But the mode has changed entirely. The engine is no longer self-reliance. It is faith: trust, dependence, leaning into the One who loved and gave himself.

The third verb resolves what the first two might otherwise leave unresolved: if the old self is dead and Christ is the one living in me, what do I do? Is there any “I” left? And if so, what is its function?

Paul’s answer is precise. There is an I left. It is not the old self — that I was crucified. It is the new I, the reconstituted self, the self that has been emptied of its autonomous identity and has received, in the emptying, the life of Another. And this new I has a mode of operation: faith. Trust. Dependence. The continuous, active, present-tense posture of leaning into the One who loved me and gave himself for me.

Notice the personal intensity of Paul’s language at the end of the verse: “who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Not “who loved the world.” Not “who gave himself for sinners.” Me. Paul is not speaking in the third person about a transaction that benefited everyone generally. He is speaking in the first person about a love that is personally, specifically, irreducibly directed at him. And the faith he lives by is not faith in a proposition. It is faith in a Person who loves him.

This is the grammar of the spiritual life in its most honest and most livable form: a dead old self, a living indwelling Christ, and a yielded new self trusting the One who has always been trustworthy.

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### **Section 4.2 — Romans 6: Reckoning, Not Striving**

*“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” —*

**Romans 6:11 (NASB)**

**Romans 6 is the great doctrinal companion to Galatians 2:20.**

Where Galatians 2:20 gives us Paul’s personal autobiography of the co-crucified life, Romans 6 gives us the systematic theological architecture that makes that autobiography intelligible. Paul’s question in Romans 6:1 — “Shall we continue in sin so that grace may increase?” — is the objection of someone who has heard the gospel of grace and drawn the wrong conclusion. If forgiveness is total and grace is inexhaustible, why does behavior matter?

Paul’s answer is not a moral argument. It is an ontological one. The question is not “Why should you stop sinning?” The question is “Do you not know what has happened to you?”

*“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” — Romans 6:3–4 (NASB)*

Baptism, in Paul’s usage here, is not primarily a ritual act. It is a description of union — the incorporation of the believer into the death and resurrection of Christ. You have been baptized into his death. You have been buried with him. You have been raised with him into newness of life. These are not imperatives — things you are being asked to do. They are indicatives — descriptions of what has already occurred.

And then, on the foundation of that indicative, Paul gives his famous imperative:

**Logizomai: The Accounting Word That Changes Everything**

The Greek word translated “consider” in Romans 6:11 is *logizomai*. It is an accounting term. In the commercial world of Paul’s day, *logizomai* meant to enter something into the ledger as fact — to record an actual transaction, to mark down in the accounts what is actually true about the current state of things.

Paul’s command is not: try to become dead to sin. It is not: work at dying to sin. It is not: suppress the old self through disciplined effort until it eventually weakens. It is: reckon. Enter into your ledger, as actual fact, what is already true: you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The discipline Paul is calling for is not the discipline of self-mortification — the effort to kill what is already dead. It is the discipline of faith-reckoning — the repeated, intentional, moment-by-moment choice to treat as actual what God has declared as actual, even when your feelings and your habits are insisting on a different account.

This distinction is not trivial. It changes the entire posture of the spiritual life.

When the primary spiritual discipline is self-mortification — trying harder to die to sin, suppressing the old patterns through willpower, adding more accountability and more disciplines in hopes that the accumulation of effort will eventually produce transformation — the direction of energy is inward and downward. You are fighting against what you perceive to be your own nature. And since you cannot actually kill what God has already killed, the fight is, in a specific sense, unnecessary and unsustainable.

When the primary spiritual discipline is faith-reckoning — taking God at his word about what has already occurred, entering into the ledger the death that has already happened and the life that has already been given, and then living from that account — the direction of energy is upward and outward. You are not fighting against your nature. You are trusting the One who has already dealt with your old nature and is at work producing a new one from the inside out.

*“Sanctification is not the suppression of the old man. It is the expression of the new man.”*

— **Watchman Nee, The Normal Christian Life**

Nee’s distinction is precise and vital. Suppression and expression are not the same spiritual operation. Suppression requires constant effort and produces constant strain. Expression requires attention and yields gradually to the natural outflow of what is within. The branch does not suppress its tendency to be a branch. It expresses its connection to the vine, and what flows from the vine produces fruit naturally.

### **The Three Steps of Reckoning**

Practical faith-reckoning, in the moment of temptation or in the daily rhythm of the spiritual life, tends to move through a recognizable sequence. It is not a formula — formulaic spirituality always ossifies into religion — but it is a pattern that experienced practitioners of the interior life have described in various ways across the centuries.

The first step is recognition: something is presenting itself — an old pattern, a temptation, a habitual response, a familiar form of self-management — that belongs to the old self rather than the new. You notice it. You name it. You do not shame yourself for its presence — the old self is dead, but its grooves are still in the neural pathways, and the grooves do not vanish in a moment. You simply recognize what is presenting itself.

The second step is reckoning: you take Paul’s imperative seriously and enter into the ledger what is actually true. This pattern belongs to a self that has been crucified. I do not have to operate from it. I do not have to negotiate with it, suppress it through willpower, or feel guilty about its presence. It has no legal claim on me. I reckon myself dead to it and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The third step is redirecting: you turn your attention toward the indwelling Presence. Not toward the temptation and the effort to resist it — that attention feeds what you are trying to disengage from. Toward Christ. Toward the living One who is present within. You yield — consciously, in this moment, with whatever degree of willingness you can honestly bring — to the One who is already there and who already has the resources this moment requires.

This three-step movement — recognize, reckon, redirect — is not the whole of the spiritual life. But it is the essential practical movement that makes the spiritual life livable rather than merely admirable.

*“You will never mortify a single sin by your own strength. The only way a sin dies is when the life of Another fills the space it occupied.”*

— John Owen, **On the Mortification of Sin**

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### **Section 4.3 — The Surrender That Is Not Defeat**

**The word surrender carries a very specific weight in the world of first responders.**

In tactical language — in the vocabulary of firefighting, law enforcement, military operations, emergency medicine — surrender is what happens when the situation has overwhelmed your capacity to continue. It is the acknowledgment of defeat. It is the moment when the resources you brought to the engagement have proven insufficient for the engagement, and the only option remaining is to stop fighting.

No responder aspires to surrender. Every training program, every standard operating procedure, every professional culture in the first responder world is organized around preventing the conditions that lead to surrender. You don't surrender. You adapt, overcome, improvise, find another way. Surrender is not in the playbook.

Which is why, for many first responders who come to faith, the language of Christian surrender creates a significant problem. The gospel keeps asking for something that every instinct and every professional formation has been devoted to preventing. Yield. Release control. Stop managing. Surrender.

The problem is not that the call to surrender is wrong. The problem is that the first responder has a richer understanding of what surrender costs than most people — and a deeper resistance to it. And the gospel needs to address that resistance directly rather than asking people to simply override it.

### **Two Kinds of Surrender**

The surrender the gospel calls for is categorically different from the surrender that the tactical vocabulary describes — and the difference is not merely semantic. It is structural.

Tactical surrender is the acknowledgment that your resources have been exhausted. You have nothing left to bring to the engagement. You are overwhelmed by a force greater than yourself, and the only rational response is to stop fighting it.

Gospel surrender is the acknowledgment that the resources you have been drawing on were never the right resources for this engagement. It is not the collapse of capacity. It is the reorientation of capacity toward its actual source. You are not giving up. You are giving over — turning the operation from the self-management system that was never designed to run it to the indwelling Christ who was.

The difference is the difference between a firefighter who has exhausted every avenue and has no choice but to abandon the structure — and a firefighter who is in radio contact with an incident commander who has a complete view of the situation, resources the firefighter can't see, and a plan that the firefighter, inside the smoke and the noise, cannot fully perceive. Tactical surrender is abandoning the structure. Gospel surrender is getting on the radio.

*“The surrender of the Christian life is not the white flag of the defeated. It is the open hand of the one who has learned that the One within them is better at running the operation than they are.”*

— Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus*

### **The Firefighter Illustration: Working With the Fire**

There is a counter-intuitive principle in structural firefighting that took the industry generations to fully understand and that newer firefighters sometimes resist because it runs against the instinct that brought them to the job: you cannot fight fire the way you fight a human adversary. You cannot simply bring overwhelming force to bear and expect the fire to yield. The fire does not respond to willpower or aggression or determination.

The firefighter who enters a structure with the goal of simply attacking the fire with maximum aggression, without understanding its behavior, its travel, its relationship to the building's structure and the available oxygen — that firefighter is not in control of the situation. They are in a reactive relationship with a force they have not understood. And reactive relationships with fire tend to end badly.

The experienced firefighter does something that looks, to the uninitiated, like something less than full engagement. They read the fire. They watch how it moves, where it breathes, what the smoke is telling them about conditions above and below and inside the walls. They make decisions based not on what they want to happen but on what the fire is actually doing. And then they position themselves and their tools not against the fire's nature but in alignment with how fire actually behaves — cutting off its fuel, controlling its oxygen, directing its movement.

They are, in a very specific sense, working with the fire rather than simply against it. Not cooperating with its destructiveness — fighting it with everything available. But doing so in alignment with its actual nature rather than in reactive opposition to it.

Gospel surrender to the indwelling Christ is structurally similar. The believer who tries to manage their spiritual life through aggressive self-will — attacking sin directly through discipline, driving toward holiness through effort, maintaining their spiritual temperature through sheer determination — is in a reactive relationship with their own interior that will exhaust them. They are fighting the fire by running at it with their hands.

The believer who has learned the way of surrender reads the interior — notices what the Spirit is doing, where grace is moving, what the indwelling Christ is working on in this season — and aligns their effort with that movement rather than substituting their own agenda for his. They are still engaged. The effort is real. But the direction of the effort has been reoriented from self-generated to Spirit-aligned.

### **Surrender as the Most Courageous Act**

There is one more thing to be said about the surrender the gospel calls for, and it is perhaps the most important thing for the first responder to hear:

It takes more courage to surrender to the indwelling Christ than it takes to continue managing your own life.

Self-management, for all its exhaustion, is familiar. You know what you are doing when you are running on your own resources. You have done it for years. The territory is mapped, the risks are known, the strategies are practiced. There is a strange comfort in the familiar suffering of a life lived entirely under your own power, precisely because it is familiar.

Surrender to the indwelling Christ requires stepping into territory you cannot fully map in advance. It requires trusting a Person rather than a strategy. It requires releasing the controls you have gripped for decades and allowing someone else — even if that someone is the Lord of the cosmos — to run the operation. For people who have been trained to be the competent one, the one who is called when things go wrong, the one whose job is to walk into chaos and bring order — this is not a small ask.

But the firefighter who cannot learn to trust the incident commander — who cannot yield their view of the situation from inside the smoke to the commander’s view from outside — is a danger to themselves and everyone around them. And the believer who cannot learn to trust the indwelling Christ — who cannot yield their management of their own interior to the One who sees it from the inside and above simultaneously — is living at a fraction of the life available to them.

Surrender is not weakness. In the kingdom of God, it is the posture of the strongest and most courageous people in the room.

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#### **Section 4.4 — Practical Surrender: Daily Habits of Yielding**

*“The practice of the presence of God is not a technique. It is the recognition of a fact: He is here, and He is in me.”*

**— Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God**

**The surrender that Galatians 2:20 describes is not a single dramatic moment.**

It is a posture that must be assumed again and again, in the ordinary rhythms of ordinary life, until it gradually becomes the default mode of operation rather than the exception. Brother Lawrence did not practice the presence of God once and live from it forever. He practiced it ten thousand times in the monastery kitchen, and each practice deepened the groove until the practice became, in some sense, his natural state.

What follows is not a program. Programs, in the spiritual life, have a particular and predictable failure mode: they work when your motivation is high and collapse when your

motivation is low. What is needed is not a program but a set of pathways — practices that are simple enough to be maintained under pressure, flexible enough to adapt to the specific rhythms of your life, and grounded enough in the actual reality of the indwelling Christ that they connect to something real rather than producing a spiritual performance.

These are offered not as the definitive list but as starting points. The person who finds none of them useful has not failed. They need different pathways. The goal is always the same: returning attention, again and again, to the One who is always and already present within.

### **The Morning Acknowledgment**

#### **Morning Acknowledgment: “Lord, this is Your day. Live it through me.”**

Before the day begins — before the phone is checked, before the demands of the shift or the household or the job begin pressing — a brief, honest acknowledgment of the reality that is already true. Not a request that Christ would become present. He already is. Not a commitment to perform better today. A recognition: this day belongs to him, and the life I am about to live is meant to be lived from his indwelling, not from my resources.

The morning acknowledgment is not a formula. Its words matter less than its direction. What it is doing, structurally, is setting the orientation of the day before the day has the opportunity to set its own orientation. The person who begins the day with an explicit, intentional recognition of the indwelling Christ begins the day already pointed in the right direction, already positioned to draw on what is actually available rather than defaulting to the familiar self-management system.

For first responders and others whose day begins in ways that don't permit a lengthy quiet time — the early alarm, the immediate demands of a household, the transition from sleep to shift with very little margin — the morning acknowledgment has the virtue of requiring almost no time. It is a sentence, or a few sentences, spoken honestly into the interior of your own life before the exterior has fully taken over. The brevity is not a concession to spiritual laziness. It is an acknowledgment that the God who indwells you is present and active whether or not you have leisure for an extended morning ritual.

### **The Breath Prayer**

#### **The Breath Prayer: Short, repeated invocations that return attention to the indwelling Presence throughout the day**

The breath prayer is one of the oldest spiritual practices in the Christian tradition, rooted in the Hesychast tradition of the Eastern church and expressed most accessibly in the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The form can be adapted to the specific reality of the indwelling life: “Christ in me — live through me.” “Lord,

I yield.” “You are here. I trust you.” Whatever words most honestly and directly return your attention to the One who dwells within.

The logic of the breath prayer is the logic of Brother Lawrence’s insight: the primary obstacle to living from the indwelling Christ is not theological but attentional. Your attention wanders. The demands of the world are constant and loud. The interior is quiet. The discipline of the breath prayer is simply the discipline of returning — not once, not in a designated spiritual moment, but throughout the day, in the spaces between the demands, as often as you remember.

For first responders, the breath prayer has a particular value precisely because of the rhythm of the job. Between calls. In the apparatus on the way to the scene. In the equipment bay during routine maintenance. In the brief, quiet moments that punctuate even the most active shift. These are not moments that permit extended prayer or Scripture meditation. But they are moments that can be used — consistently, over time — to return attention to the indwelling Presence and to realign the interior posture before the next demand arrives.

The cumulative effect of thousands of small returns is the gradual deepening of habitual awareness — the slow formation of a person who carries the awareness of the indwelling Christ not as a special spiritual achievement but as the natural background of their daily life.

## **The Examen**

### **The Examen: The ancient practice of reviewing the day for moments of Christ’s movement and your response to it**

Developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century as a tool for discernment and self-awareness, the Examen is a brief daily review — typically done in the evening — that asks two questions in sequence: Where did I sense the movement of Christ today? And where did I resist or miss it? The goal is not self-condemnation for the second category but honest awareness that deepens the capacity to recognize and respond to Christ’s interior movement.

The Examen is the practice of learning to read your own interior — to develop the trained perception that can distinguish between the movement of the indwelling Christ and the noise of your own self-management system. This is a skill, and like all skills it is developed through practice. The person who has never deliberately attended to the interior movements of grace will have difficulty recognizing them in real time. The Examen builds the capacity for that recognition by making it a daily, reflective habit.

For people who carry the weight of a difficult vocation — who come to the end of the day carrying the residue of what they have seen and done — the Examen also serves as a form of pastoral self-care. It creates a structured moment to process the day not just emotionally but spiritually — to ask where God was in the worst of it, where grace appeared in the places it was least expected, where the indwelling Christ was present even when you were too absorbed in the crisis to notice.

This is not an exercise in manufactured spiritual significance. The firefighter who responds to a pediatric trauma does not need to be told that God was present and working. But they may need the space and the structure to go back, later, and actually look for where and how. The Examen provides that space.

### **Surrender-in-the-Moment**

#### **Surrender-in-the-Moment: Learning to pause under pressure and yield to the One within before responding**

This practice is the most demanding and the most transformative of the four. It is the habit of creating, in the moment of pressure — before the reactive response, before the default system activates, before the old pattern reasserts itself — a brief interior pause. A fraction of a second, or a few seconds if the situation permits. A micro-yield: Lord, this is yours. I'm not going to run this from the old system. I yield to you.

The surrender-in-the-moment practice is what the other three practices make possible. The morning acknowledgment orients the day. The breath prayer maintains the awareness throughout the day. The Examen builds the capacity to recognize Christ's movement. And all three together, practiced over time, gradually create the interior condition in which the surrender-in-the-moment becomes not only possible but natural.

This practice is particularly important in high-stakes, high-pressure environments, because the high-stakes moment is precisely when the default system is most likely to activate. The stress response is real, it is neurological, and it moves faster than conscious decision-making. Training can shape the default response — which is why the formation programs of every emergency service focus on drilling responses under simulated pressure, so that when actual pressure arrives, the trained response is what activates rather than raw fear.

Spiritual formation works by the same logic. The believer who has practiced surrender-in-the-moment in low-stakes situations — in the argument with the spouse, in the frustrating traffic, in the moment of minor irritation — has been drilling the response that they will need in the high-stakes moment. The habit of yielding to the indwelling Christ under minor pressure is the training ground for yielding to him under major pressure.

And the person who has practiced it across thousands of low-stakes moments carries, into the highest-pressure moments of their life, an internalized reflex: not the reactive response of the old self, but the yielded attention of the new self trusting the One who is already within.

Brother Lawrence was not born with this capacity. He developed it across years of kitchen labor and monastery routine. The result was a man who, by the end of his life, described the presence of God not as an achievement but as his natural atmosphere — the element he lived in the way a fish lives in water.

This is available to every believer. Not immediately. Not easily. But actually.

*“For many years I resisted the practice of surrender because it felt like weakness. I have since discovered that it is the only posture from which I can actually live the life I was made for.”*

— Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

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### **The Death That Opens Everything**

**There is a paradox at the heart of the Christian life that no amount of theological explanation fully resolves — it can only be lived.**

The death that Paul describes in Galatians 2:20 is real. The crucifixion of the old self is not a metaphor for a gradual improvement process. It is the language of execution — violent, complete, final. And yet on the other side of that death is not emptiness but fullness. Not absence but presence. Not the silence of a life ended but the voice of a life that has found its true source.

The death that gives life is the strangest and most counterintuitive truth in the universe. It runs against every survival instinct, every self-preservation reflex, every natural inclination toward the familiar comfort of self-management. And yet the testimony of every person who has genuinely inhabited it is consistent across two thousand years of Christian witness: the life on the other side of the surrender is more, not less. More real, not less real. More fully human, not less.

Because what dies in co-crucifixion is not you. It is the self that was never fully you — the constructed self, the managed self, the self that was assembled in response to the pressures and wounds and demands of a life lived without the indwelling Christ. What is revealed, on the other side, is the self that was always there but buried: the particular, irreplaceable, grain-of-the-wood version of the image of God that was embedded in your

humanity at the moment of your creation and that the indwelling Christ has been working to reveal from the inside out.

The old self was not your truest self. Surrendering it is not loss. It is the beginning of the discovery of what has always been there.

The next chapter takes this surrender into its most sustained and most daily expression: abiding. Because the way of surrender is not a one-time act but an ongoing posture — the posture of the branch that has discovered it does not need to produce the fruit, only to remain connected to the vine.

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### Reflection Questions

These questions are designed to move the theology of this chapter into the actual territory of your life. They are most valuable when answered with specificity rather than generality.

- Where are you most tempted to “live by your own efforts” rather than trusting the indwelling Christ? Name the specific area — the relationship, the role, the recurring struggle — where the self-management system is most deeply grooved. What would it mean to reckon that area as belonging to the co-crucified old self?
- What would daily surrender look like practically, given your specific role and rhythms? Of the four practices offered in Section 4.4, which one is most immediately accessible to you? Which one creates the most resistance, and why?
- How does the distinction between ‘striving’ and ‘reckoning’ change your approach to the spiritual struggles you are currently facing? Where have you been trying to suppress what Christ has already addressed? What would it look like to trust the reckoning rather than intensifying the effort?
- For first responders: How does the illustration of surrender as getting on the radio with the incident commander rather than abandoning the structure land for you? Where in your professional or personal life are you in the smoke, operating on your own read of the situation, when the Incident Commander has a different view?
- The chapter closes with the claim that what dies in co-crucifixion is not you but the constructed self — and that what is revealed is your truest self. Does that feel true?

What part of the constructed self are you most attached to, and why? What might the 'grain of the wood' look like in your particular life if it were more fully revealed?

*"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." — Galatians 2:20 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT II • CHAPTER FIVE

#### Abiding

##### *The Art of Staying Connected*

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” —*  
**John 15:4–5 (NASB)**

**On the last night before his crucifixion, Jesus took his disciples through a vineyard — or past one.**

The Kidron valley was lined with them, and some scholars suggest the great golden vine that decorated the entrance to the Temple mount may have been visible in the torchlight as he taught. Whatever the physical setting, the image he reached for was one every person in that company would have understood from childhood: a vine, its branches, and the relationship between them that made the difference between abundance and death.

He did not choose this image randomly. He had already described himself as the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the door of the sheep, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life. Each of these images carried its freight of meaning. The vine is the last of the great “I am” statements in John’s Gospel, and it is the most intimate — because it is the only one that places the disciple not in the position of beneficiary but of participant.

You are not merely recipients of the bread. You are not merely illuminated by the light. You are branches of the vine — sharing, through organic union, the single life that flows from the source through every connected part. The relationship is not consumer to product, or flock to shepherd. It is the sharing of life itself between the vine and every branch that remains connected to it.

And the teaching that flows from this image is the most radical and most liberating reorientation of the spiritual life available in the New Testament:

***You do not produce the fruit. You remain in the One who produces it through you.***

This chapter is about what that remaining — abiding — actually looks like. Not as an abstract spiritual ideal but as a practiced art in the ordinary, pressured, often chaotic conditions of real life. In the fire station and the job site and the kitchen and the recovery meeting and the midnight of the bad call that won't release its grip.

Abiding is not a destination. It is the art of staying connected in the middle of everything.

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### **Section 5.1 — Abiding Is Not Striving**

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” — John 15:4 (NASB)*

**The first and most important thing to establish about abiding is what it is not.**

It is not a spiritual achievement. It is not a level of devotion that advanced believers maintain while newer or less committed believers are still working toward it. It is not a state of continuous conscious awareness that must be held by concentrated effort against the constant tide of distraction and demand. It is not something you perform for God in order to qualify for the fruit he wants to produce.

These misunderstandings of abiding are not hypothetical. They are endemic. Walk through any tradition of serious evangelical Christianity and you will find people who understand abiding as a standard of spiritual performance — a bar of sustained closeness to God that, if they could only maintain it consistently enough, would unlock the fruitfulness they have been straining toward. And who have discovered, painfully, that the more they strain, the further the standard seems to recede.

This is not abiding. This is its opposite. And it produces not the fruit of the Spirit but the exhaustion of the striving Christian, who has taken the most restful invitation in the New Testament and turned it into one more demand.

#### **What Meno Actually Means**

The Greek word translated “abide” throughout John 15 is meno. It is one of John’s most characteristic words — appearing forty times in the Gospel and twenty-seven times in the Johannine letters, more than in any other New Testament author. John uses it to describe the most fundamental quality of the relationship between the Father and the Son, between Christ and the believer, between the Spirit and the community of faith.

Meno means to remain, to stay, to dwell, to not leave. In its most basic sense it is the opposite of departing. The question of abiding is never whether you arrive — the branch is

already on the vine, the union is already accomplished, the Spirit already dwells within. The question is whether you stay.

This is a crucial distinction. Abiding is not the effort to get connected. It is the choice to remain connected. You are already on the vine. The question is not how you establish what is already established but how you maintain it — or, more precisely, how you stop breaking it. Because the branch does not fall off the vine by accident. It drifts. It turns its attention elsewhere. It begins to draw on reserves of its own rather than the sap flowing from the source. And gradually, imperceptibly, what was a vital connection begins to thin.

Meno — remaining — is the deliberate, continuous, moment-by-moment choice not to let that thinning happen. To keep the connection clear. To keep turning back toward the source. To not carry independently what was never meant to be carried without the vine.

*“Abiding is not the achievement of the spiritual elite. It is the inheritance of the desperate — those who know they have nothing apart from the Vine.”*

— **Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ**

Murray’s formulation is precisely right and deeply pastoral. The person most naturally suited to abiding is not the spiritually accomplished but the spiritually desperate — the one who has run out of their own resources thoroughly enough to have stopped pretending they have any. The person who has been broken enough, failed enough, tried hard enough and found it insufficient enough, that the only posture left is the one Jesus is inviting: remaining in the vine because there is genuinely nowhere else to go.

The ragamuffin is the natural abider. Not because they are spiritually advanced but because they know they have nothing. And the nothing is, paradoxically, the very qualification the vine requires. The branch that believes it can produce fruit independently has already begun to separate from the source of the only life it has.

### **Abiding as Attention, Not Achievement**

If meno means remaining rather than achieving, the spiritual practice of abiding is less about doing and more about attending. The branch does not produce the connection to the vine. It maintains the connection by the simple, continuous, unglamorous act of staying where it is and drawing from what flows.

In practical terms, abiding is the practice of keeping your attention oriented toward the indwelling Presence rather than away from it. Not a single dramatic act but a continuous gentle returning — ten thousand small decisions across the course of a day to notice the One who is already there, to turn toward him rather than away, to draw from the vine rather than straining to produce the fruit independently.

This reframing has enormous practical consequences. The person who has meditated on Scripture for an hour in the morning and the person who has grabbed thirty seconds of breath prayer between calls have both, in their different ways, been practicing the same art. The art of remaining. The art of not departing. The art of keeping the point of attachment clear and the flow between vine and branch unobstructed.

Abiding is not the exclusive property of people with leisure for extended contemplative practice. It is available to every person in every vocation in every circumstance of life — because it is not primarily about what you do for a designated period of time in a designated sacred space. It is about the orientation of your inner life toward the One who is always already within you, in every space, in every moment.

*“Abiding is not passive inactivity. It is the most active thing a branch can do — the continuous, deliberate, faith-sustained choice to remain in contact with the source of every life it has.”*

— Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

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## **Section 5.2 — What Breaks Abiding: The Three Disconnectors**

**If abiding is the art of remaining connected, the pastoral question is not only what abiding looks like but what breaks it.**

Most believers who are experiencing disconnection have been told that the solution is to try harder to be connected — to add more prayer, more Scripture, more spiritual discipline. Sometimes that is the right prescription. But often the disconnector is something specific that is compromising the point of attachment. Identifying the specific disconnector is more useful than simply intensifying the general effort.

### **Disconnector One: Unconfessed Sin**

Not guilt — but hiding. The branch has not fallen off the vine. The branch is concealing a wound at the point of attachment and pretending the wound is not there. God is not surprised. God knows. But the hiding — the refusal to bring the specific, named thing into the light — creates a practical barrier to the flow of grace.

There is an important distinction between guilt and hiding. Guilt is the appropriate signal the conscience sends when behavior has violated a real standard. Properly received, guilt is not an enemy of abiding. It is a servant of it — the messenger that says: something needs to be addressed here, something in the point of attachment has been compromised, and the clear path back is through honesty and confession.

Hiding is what happens when guilt is not properly received. Hiding is the choice to keep the specific, named thing in the dark rather than bringing it into the light — to carry the awareness of it privately, to allow it to sit between the believer and God without being directly addressed. The connection is not severed. The flow is blocked. And the thing blocking it is not the sin itself but the concealment of the sin.

*“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” — 1 John 1:9 (NASB)*

The word John uses for confess — *homologeō* — means literally to “say the same thing”: to say about the thing what God says about it. Not to perform elaborate self-punishment. Simply to bring the specific, named thing into the light and agree with God about what it is. Confession does not add something new to the relationship. It removes something that was blocking the flow of what was already there. The sap was always in the vine. Confession clears the point of attachment.

### **Disconnecter Two: Distracted Attention**

Not the absence of Christ — but the absence of awareness. The vine has not withdrawn. The connection has not been severed. But the branch has turned its attention so completely toward the demands of the external world that it has effectively lost contact with the internal reality of the indwelling Presence. The flow has not stopped. The channel of attention has closed.

This is the most common disconnecter in the contemporary world. Its symptom is not dramatic failure but ordinary busyness. The person whose attention has been captured by the relentless demands of a difficult life — a high-pressure vocation, a family in crisis, a season of acute stress — is not spiritually negligent. They are simply overwhelmed. And the overwhelm is the disconnecter.

Many believers experiencing spiritual dryness — the loss of the sense of God’s presence, the silence where there was once communion — conclude that Christ has withdrawn. That they have disqualified themselves from his presence. That the dryness is a verdict. It is not a verdict. It is a symptom. The vine has not withdrawn from the branch. The branch’s attention has been so thoroughly captured by the external that the interior has gone quiet. The radio is still broadcasting. The receiver has stopped listening.

The prescription for distracted attention is not guilt about the distraction. Guilt compounds the disconnection. The prescription is the simple, gentle, non-dramatic return of attention to the One who is always already present. Brother Lawrence described this as the defining practice of his life: not the heroic maintenance of unbroken awareness, but the ten-thousand-times return. You drift. You notice you have drifted. You return. No self-

condemnation, no elaborate recovery ritual. Simply the turn back toward the Presence that was never absent.

*“Do not be discouraged by the wandering of your mind. Each time you notice you have drifted, the noticing itself is a grace — and the return is the practice.”*

— **Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God**

### **Disconnecter Three: Self-Sufficiency**

The oldest temptation in the garden and the most insidious for the competent. When things go well — when the resources seem adequate, when the skills are sufficient, when the situation is manageable — the branch forgets that the life flowing through it is not its own. Self-sufficiency is not the dramatic declaration of independence. It is the quiet, gradual assumption that you are doing fine on your own.

Self-sufficiency is peculiarly dangerous for the gifted and the capable, because competence is a genuine virtue in most domains where human beings operate. The skilled first responder who trusts their training, the experienced craftsman who trusts their tools, the capable parent who trusts their instincts — in each case the trust is not misplaced. The competence is real.

The problem is not the competence. The problem is when it migrates from the vocational register into the spiritual register — when the person who is genuinely capable in the external world begins, unconsciously, to apply the same framework to the interior life. I am doing fine. I have the skills. I can handle this. The self-sufficiency that serves them well on the job site begins to function as the organizing principle of the spiritual life, and the branch gradually, quietly, imperceptibly stops drawing from the vine because it no longer feels the urgency of its need.

*“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” —*

### **Revelation 3:17 (NASB)**

The Laodicean church was not morally flagrant. It was not doctrinally heretical. It was self-sufficient. And self-sufficiency in the spiritual life is precisely the condition that feels like health while functioning as disconnection. The branch that says “I am doing well” without noticing that the sap has gradually slowed is the branch most at risk of the quiet withering that arrives not with drama but with the slow realization that there is no fruit.

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### **Section 5.3 — The Fruit That Comes Naturally**

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” — Galatians 5:22–23 (NASB)*

**There is a grammatical detail in Paul’s fruit-of-the-Spirit passage that is easy to miss but that changes everything about how we read the list.**

The word translated “fruit” is *karpos* — singular. Not “fruits.” One. The nine qualities that follow are not nine separate spiritual achievements, nine distinct goals to be pursued independently, nine boxes to be checked on the way to spiritual maturity. They are nine facets of a single reality: the life of the indwelling Spirit, expressed through a yielded human being.

The person who reads Galatians 5:22–23 as a list of spiritual achievements will spend their energy dividing and conquering — working on patience this month, love next month, self-control in the third quarter. The effort is earnest and the frustration is predictable, because the fruit is not meant to be manufactured. It is meant to be grown. And it grows, all of it, as the single, integrated expression of the Spirit’s life flowing through the abiding believer.

You do not try to produce love any more than an apple tree tries to produce apples. The tree remains connected to its roots, draws from what is flowing through it, and the apples appear in the season appointed for them. The tree’s job is not fruit production. The tree’s job is being a tree — remaining what it is, rooted in what sustains it, and letting what flows through it do what it naturally does.

#### **Each Fruit as a Dimension of the Same Life**

Examining the individual qualities is not a return to the list-and-check approach, provided we understand what we are examining. We are looking at nine dimensions of a single reality — the life of the indwelling Christ, fully expressed through a fully yielded human being. Each quality reveals something specific about what that life looks like in the texture of human relationship and experience.

**Love (*agapē*)** — The self-giving, other-centered love that is the character of God himself. It is not an emotion to be generated but a Person to be expressed — the One who is love, living through the yielded branch.

**Joy (*chara*)** — Not the happiness that circumstances produce but the deep, settled gladness that flows from a life lived in union with the source of all goodness. Joy was present in Paul’s prison letters because it does not depend on the exterior. It flows from the interior.

**Peace (*eirēnē*)** — The shalom of the Old Testament — not the absence of conflict but the wholeness of a life ordered around its true center. The peace of the indwelling Christ is not manufactured calm. It is structural coherence — what happens when a life is living from what it was made for.

**Patience (*makrothymia*)** — Literally ‘long-tempered’ — the capacity to endure difficult people and circumstances without being compressed into reactivity. Patience is what the indwelling Christ produces in branches that remain connected during seasons when the vine’s life is sustaining what the branch cannot sustain on its own.

**Kindness (*chrēstotēs*)** — The quality of being useful, beneficial, generous in daily interaction. Practical, active beneficence — not merely warm feeling but the actual disposition to be good for others in concrete, ordinary ways.

**Goodness (*agathosynē*)** — A moral quality — the actual inner virtue from which good actions flow. Not the performance of good acts but the formation of a character from which good acts emerge naturally, the way fragrance emerges from a flower without the flower trying.

**Faithfulness (*pistis*)** — Reliability, trustworthiness, the quality of being someone who can be counted on. The person in whom the indwelling Christ is at work becomes, gradually, a person whose word holds, whose presence can be trusted — not through superhuman willpower but through the faithfulness of the One who lives within.

**Gentleness (*prautēs*)** — Often translated ‘meekness,’ but closer to controlled strength — the power that does not need to assert itself, the authority that does not need to dominate. Jesus described himself as gentle and lowly in heart, and it is his particular character that the Spirit produces in the yielded branch.

**Self-control (*enkrateia*)** — The ordering of desire around its proper center. Not the white-knuckled restraint of the moralist but the natural orientation of a person whose deepest desires are being met by the indwelling Presence rather than diverted into substitutes.

What is most striking about this list is that every quality on it is a description of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is not a set of virtues that need to be grafted onto the believer’s character from the outside. It is the character of the indwelling Christ, naturally expressed through a branch that has remained connected long enough that his life has become the dominant life flowing through it.

*“The fruit of the Spirit is simply the character of Jesus reproduced in the believer by the Holy Spirit. It is not our fruit. It is his fruit, grown in us, through us, for the nourishment of those*

*around us.”*

— **John Stott, The Message of Galatians**

### **The Pruning: Why Seasons of Loss Are Not Seasons of Punishment**

*“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” — John 15:2 (NASB)*

Jesus’s teaching on the vine does not only describe the abundance of the connected life. It describes the pruning — and the pruning is worth careful attention because it is so often misread as punishment when it is actually the opposite.

In viticulture, pruning is the deliberate, skilled cutting back of growth — sometimes healthy growth — in order to redirect the vine’s energy toward the most fruitful branches. The skilled vinedresser cuts branches that are producing fruit — sometimes drastically — because they know what the branch cannot know: that the pruning will produce more abundant fruit in the season to come than the unpruned branch could ever have generated on its own.

The branch being pruned does not experience it as care. It experiences it as loss. The growth being removed was real. The sense of diminishment is genuine. Every believer who has walked through a season of stripping — the loss of something that felt like spiritual vitality, the removal of a role or a relationship or a capacity that seemed essential — knows this experience intimately. And the question that arises in those seasons is always the same: is this punishment, or is this care?

John 15:2 answers the question. The pruning is the Father’s work, and it is always in the direction of greater fruitfulness. The branch cannot see the next season’s harvest. The vinedresser can. The skilled, loving, purposeful cutting that feels like damage from the inside is the means by which the vine’s life is directed toward the most abundant expression available.

The abiding branch — the branch that remains connected to the vine even through the pruning — discovers in the next season what the pruning was for. The branch that breaks away from the vine during the pruning, because the experience of loss seems incompatible with the love of the vinedresser, forfeits the harvest that was being prepared for it.

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### **Section 5.4 — Abiding in the Fire Station, the Job Site, and the Kitchen**

*“He who has learned to live in the ordinary with God will never lack for the extraordinary.”*  
— **Henri Nouwen, The Return of the Prodigal Son**

## **The greatest practical challenge of the abiding life is not theological but environmental.**

It is the challenge of maintaining interior connection to the indwelling Christ in environments that were not designed for it — that generate constant, loud, demanding exterior noise that drowns out the quiet interior signal of the indwelling Presence. The monastery was designed for abiding. The daily rhythm of prayer, the physical space organized around the reality of the sacred, the communal support of the contemplative life — all of it structured to sustain the practice of the Presence.

Brother Lawrence practiced the presence of God in a monastery kitchen — and the kitchen, relative to a fire station or a construction site or a household with young children, was a relative paradise of interior quiet. If abiding required the conditions of the monastery, it would be unavailable to the vast majority of believers in the world. It does not. The question is what the art of staying connected takes on as its particular form in the environments where most readers of this book spend most of their lives.

### **Portrait One: The Firefighter Abiding Between Calls**

#### **The Fire Station**

*It is the third hour of a twenty-four-hour shift. The morning tasks are done. The apparatus has been checked. The training evolution is complete. There is a particular quality of time in a fire station between calls — not quiet exactly, because there are always other personnel and the background noise of the station's life. But not fully claimed either. Time that belongs to the organization but is not currently consumed by it.*

Most of this time, in most stations, is filled with exactly the things you would expect: conversation, television, meals, informal camaraderie. None of this is wrong. The relational life of a fire station is one of its most important features — the trust and familiarity built in the station is what functions under pressure on the scene.

But for the believer who is learning the art of abiding, this between-time is also an opportunity. Not to withdraw from the community into private religious practice — that would be both unusual and counterproductive. But to practice the interior orientation the chapter has been describing: the quiet turn of attention toward the indwelling Presence that does not require a change of location, a change of activity, or a change of company.

The breath prayer between conversations. The brief, wordless acknowledgment: Lord, you are here. I am here. Whatever comes through that bay door next, you go first. The Examen at the end of the shift — not as a formal religious exercise but as a deliberate five minutes: where was Christ moving today? Where did I carry it alone when I didn't have to? What held when everything else was loud?

The firefighter who practices this art is not conducting themselves differently in any way their crew can see. They are the same colleague, doing the same work, showing up with the same professionalism. What is different is entirely interior. But the interior difference is the one that, over years, produces the exterior difference that the watching world notices — the quality of presence under pressure, the character that does not erode under stress, the response to crisis that draws on something deeper than training alone.

## **Portrait Two: The Parent Abiding Through the Chaos of a Household**

### **The Kitchen Table at 5:47 PM**

*Dinner is not ready. One child is crying for reasons that are unclear. Another is arguing about homework. The dog wants out. The phone has pinged three times with work messages that will not wait. The parent who was on shift until two hours ago has not yet transitioned from the professional mode that the job requires to the relational mode that the household needs. And the household, in its wisdom, is not waiting for the transition to be complete.*

This is the environment in which the theology of the indwelling Christ must either be real or reveal itself as irrelevant. The monastery is designed for God. The household at 5:47 PM is designed for almost everything else. If abiding is only possible in environments of quiet and order, it is not available to the parent of young children during the years when they need it most.

The great testimony of the tradition of ordinary holiness — the spirituality of Francis de Sales, Jean-Pierre de Caussade’s “sacrament of the present moment,” the domestic mysticism of the Reformers who insisted that the kitchen was as holy a vocation as the monastery — is that the chaos is not an obstacle to the presence of God. It is the environment in which the presence of God is available to be inhabited.

The child who is crying is, in Christian anthropology, an image-bearer of the living God entrusted to this particular parent’s care. The argument about homework is an opportunity for the patience that the vine produces in branches that remain connected. The domestic chaos is not the interruption of the sacred life. It is the sacred life — the specific, unrepeatable form that the indwelling Christ takes in this household, in this evening.

The practical shape of abiding for the parent in the chaotic household is not the thirty-minute quiet time that the season of young children will not permit. It is the breath prayer in the car before walking through the door. It is the micro-surrender at the moment of maximal chaos: Lord, you are in this. I yield this evening to you. It is the Examen at the end of the night, after the children are in bed, that looks back on the chaos and finds — always, for those who look — the places where grace moved through the ordinary.

## **Portrait Three: The Recovering Addict Abiding Through Craving**

### **9:17 PM on a Thursday**

*The craving arrived, as it always does, without warning and without mercy. Not as an abstract temptation to be evaluated at a philosophical remove but as a bodily, neurological, insistent demand — the memory of relief that the substance produced, amplified by the stress of a difficult week and the loneliness of a Thursday evening with no particular structure to hold it. The meeting was last night. The sponsor is not immediately available. And the craving does not care about any of this.*

The theology of the indwelling Christ has a specific and urgent pastoral application for the person in recovery, and it is not the application most commonly made in Christian recovery contexts.

The most common application is motivational: Christ will help you resist. The truth is more radical than that. Christ is not the supplement to your resistance. He is the ground of an identity that the craving cannot reach if you know where you stand. The craving is addressing the old self — the self organized around the substance, that found in it a form of relief that nothing else seemed to provide. The old self has been crucified. The craving is speaking to a corpse.

This is not a denial of the neurological reality of addiction. The craving is real, it is powerful, and it does not yield easily to theological propositions. But the person who knows that their deepest identity is not the addict self but the Christ-indwelt self — who has practiced, in the less intense moments, the reckoning that Romans 6:11 describes — has a resource available in the moment of craving that is categorically different from willpower.

They can turn attention to the indwelling Presence not as a last resort when willpower has failed but as the first and natural movement of a person who has learned to live from the inside out. Not: I must resist this. But: Lord, you are here. This craving is addressing someone I no longer am. I yield this moment to you.

The indwelling Christ is not an emergency resource to be accessed when other resources have been exhausted. He is the ground — the always-available, always-present, always-sufficient source of the life that the craving is, in its confused and destructive way, reaching for. The abiding life is the life that has found the actual source of what the substance was mimicking, and has learned to draw from it in the ordinary moments — which is the only training that makes the extraordinary moments survivable.

*“The saint is not someone who has risen above the need that drives the addict. The saint is someone who has found the actual source that the addict is searching for in the wrong place. The difference is not virtue. It is discovery.”*

— Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

### **The Extraordinary in the Ordinary**

Nouwen’s observation — that the person who has learned to live in the ordinary with God will never lack for the extraordinary — is confirmed in every one of these portraits.

The extraordinary is not the dramatic. The extraordinary is the quality of presence that is available to a person who carries the awareness of the indwelling Christ into ordinary environments. The firefighter whose response under pressure draws on something their training alone cannot account for. The parent whose presence in the chaotic household has a quality the children cannot name but can feel. The recovering person whose sobriety carries an interior groundedness recognizably different from the white-knuckled restraint of someone just barely holding on.

These are the extraordinary things that happen when ordinary people have learned the art of staying connected. Not the dramatic spiritual experiences of the religious elite. The quiet, consistent, recognizable difference that the indwelling Christ produces through the branch that has learned to remain in the vine.

This is the fruit. Not manufactured. Not performed. Grown.

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### **The Art of Staying**

**Jesus said: Abide in me. Not: achieve connection with me. Not: maintain a sufficient standard of spiritual performance to remain in relationship with me. Abide. Stay. Remain. Don’t leave.**

The entire invitation of John 15 is built on the assumption that the connection already exists — you are already on the vine, already in the relationship, already the recipient of the life that flows from the source. The question is not how to establish what is already established. The question is how to remain in what you already have.

And the answer is simpler than the spiritual industry often makes it sound. Pay attention to the One who is always already present. When your attention wanders — and it will, ten thousand times a day — return it. Without drama, without guilt, without elaborate recovery protocols. Simply return. The vine is still there. The connection is still intact. The sap is still flowing. You drifted. Now come back.

This is the art of abiding. It is not mastered in a season. It is practiced across a lifetime. And the practitioner at the end of a lifetime of returning is not a spiritual hero who never drifted. They are a person who has returned so many times that the return has become their natural movement — the reflex of a life that has learned, slowly and through the whole range of ordinary experience, that there is nowhere better to be than where they already are.

In the vine. Connected. Abiding. And from that abiding, without effort or strain or performance, the fruit comes.

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### **Reflection Questions**

These questions are most valuable when brought to a specific, named environment rather than answered in the abstract. Think about the particular setting where you spend most of your waking hours and let the questions meet you there.

- In what specific settings do you find it hardest to ‘remain’ connected to the indwelling Christ? Name the environment, the time of day, the kind of situation. Which of the three disconnectors — unconfessed sin, distracted attention, or self-sufficiency — is most characteristic of your experience in that setting?
- How would understanding abiding as attention rather than achievement change your daily spiritual experience? What would you stop trying to do? What would you start doing instead? Be specific enough that tomorrow would look different.
- Where do you see the fruit of the Spirit genuinely emerging in your life right now — not through your effort, but through the natural expression of the indwelling life? Name it specifically. And where do you see the evidence of disconnection — the areas where the fruit is conspicuously absent or thin?
- Which of the three practical portraits — the firefighter, the parent, or the recovering addict — most closely maps to your own daily experience? What does the art of staying connected look like in your specific environment, given your specific constraints?
- Is there a current season of loss or diminishment in your life that might be the vinedresser’s pruning rather than punishment? What would it mean to abide through the pruning — to remain connected even when the experience of the connection feels like damage rather than care?

*“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” — John 15:5 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT II • CHAPTER SIX

#### Filled with All the Fullness of God

*The Ongoing Experience of the Spirit*

*“...that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us...”*

— **Ephesians 3:19b–20 (NASB)**

#### **Paul is on his knees.**

The posture matters — Paul mentions it explicitly, which is unusual. In first-century Jewish prayer practice, standing was the normal posture. Kneeling was reserved for moments of unusual intensity, unusual urgency, unusual weight. When Paul writes in Ephesians 3:14 that he “bows his knees before the Father,” he is signaling that what follows is not a routine prayer. It is a prayer that has pressed him to the floor.

What presses him there is not crisis or catastrophe. It is the staggering scope of what he is about to ask on behalf of the Ephesian believers. The prayer that begins in Ephesians 3:14 and culminates in verse 19 is, by any measure, the most expansive petition in the New Testament. It asks for things that strain the capacity of human language to contain — for comprehension of dimensions that are beyond comprehension, for knowledge of a love that surpasses knowledge.

And at the summit of the prayer, Paul asks for something so large that, if we read it with the eyes we usually bring to familiar texts, we tend to slide over it without registering what has just been said:

*“...that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”* — **Ephesians 3:19b (NASB)**

Filled up to all the fullness of God. Not filled with some of the fullness. Not filled with a portion appropriate to your current spiritual maturity. Not filled with as much as you can handle, calibrated to your specific capacity. Filled up to all the fullness of God.

The Greek is *eis pan to pleroma tou theou*. Into all the fullness of God. The same *pleroma* — the fullness of the divine being — that Paul announced in Colossians 1:19 as dwelling in

Christ and in Colossians 2:10 as available to every believer through union with Christ. He prays that the Ephesian believers would experience it not as a doctrinal position but as a living, present, overflowing reality.

This is what Paul is on his knees about. Not good behavior. Not moral improvement. Not doctrinal precision. The actual, experienced, overflowing fullness of the living God in the interior of ordinary human beings.

This chapter is about how that prayer is answered — not in heaven, not at death, not in some future moment of ultimate completion, but in the ordinary days of the ordinary life you are living right now.

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### **Section 6.1 — Indwelling vs. Filling: Two Aspects of One Reality**

**Before we can understand what Paul is praying for in Ephesians 3, we need to make a distinction that the New Testament makes consistently but that is often collapsed in popular teaching.**

There are two related but distinct aspects of the Spirit's work in the believer. They draw from the same source. They involve the same Person. They are not in competition or contradiction. But they operate differently, they are received differently, and they produce different pastoral consequences when they are confused.

The first is indwelling. The second is filling.

#### **Indwelling: Permanent, Unconditional, Given at Salvation**

The indwelling of the Spirit is the foundational reality we have been exploring throughout this book. From the moment of new birth, the Spirit of the living God takes up permanent residence in the believer. This is not something you receive in portions as you grow in spiritual maturity. It is not conditional on your performance, your consistency, or the degree of your surrender. It is the unconditional gift of new covenant relationship — given once, given fully, given to stay.

*“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” —*  
**1 Corinthians 3:16 (NASB)**

Paul does not say the Spirit dwells in the spiritually advanced among you, or in the ones who have maintained their surrender consistently, or in those who have not grieved him through repeated failure. He says “you” — the entire congregation at Corinth, which he has just spent three chapters describing as a community riddled with divisions, immaturity,

and serious moral failures. The Spirit's indwelling is not contingent on the Corinthians' current spiritual condition. It is prior to it and independent of it.

The indwelling is the foundation. It is the permanent, unchanging, unconditional reality that makes everything else in the Christian life possible. You do not need to earn it, maintain it, or recover it when you fail. It is there. It has been there since the day you first believed. It will be there tomorrow, whatever tomorrow holds.

### **Filling: Fluctuating, Responsive, Experientially Variable**

The filling of the Spirit is a different category, and it is the one Paul is praying about in Ephesians 3 and commanding in Ephesians 5. If the indwelling describes the permanent presence of the Spirit in the believer, the filling describes the degree to which that presence is operative — experienced, expressed, and empowering — in the believer's current moment.

The filling is real. It is not merely subjective or emotional, though it has subjective and emotional dimensions. It is the experiential accessibility, in the present moment, of the fullness that is always and permanently present. And it fluctuates. Not because the Spirit leaves and returns, but because the degree of our openness, our yielding, our conscious cooperation with his work varies.

Think of it this way. A house that has central heating has, by definition, a heat source. The furnace is there. The ducts are in the walls. The system is installed and operational. Whether the house is warm depends not on the presence or absence of the furnace but on whether the thermostat is set, the vents are open, and nothing is blocking the flow of heat from the source to the living spaces.

The indwelling Spirit is the furnace. The filling is the warmth in the room. The furnace does not turn off when you ignore it. But the room will be cold if the vents are blocked.

**INDWELLING:** Permanent. Unconditional. Given at salvation. The foundation of every spiritual reality. 'Christ in you' — Colossians 1:27.

**FILLING:** Fluctuating. Responsive to surrender and faith. The daily experiential dimension. 'Be being filled' — Ephesians 5:18.

### **Why the Distinction Matters Pastorally**

The confusion of indwelling and filling produces two opposite and equally damaging pastoral errors.

The first error is the error of the person who understands only indwelling. They know, doctrinally, that the Spirit dwells within them from the moment of salvation. They know this

is permanent and unconditional. And they conclude — understandably but wrongly — that the entire question of the Spirit’s work in their life has been settled at conversion. There is nothing more to receive. There is nothing more to open themselves to. The Spirit is there; the account is full. The result is a spirituality that is theologically correct but experientially flat, a life organized around the permanent fact of the indwelling without any corresponding pursuit of the ongoing, renewable, practically transforming experience of being filled.

The second error is the error of the person who understands only filling. They know the Spirit moves, that there are seasons of unusual presence and power, that the filling is a real and renewable experience. But they have not been grounded in the permanence of the indwelling. So their spiritual life becomes a pursuit of the next filling experience, an anxious oscillation between the heights of felt presence and the depths of felt absence, with no stable foundation to stand on when the experience is absent. They are chasing a feeling rather than resting in a Person.

The full New Testament picture holds both. The indwelling is the foundation — permanent, unconditional, the ground of security and identity. The filling is the daily, ongoing, renewable experience that flows from the foundation when the believer is yielded, attentive, and walking in conscious dependence on the One who permanently dwells within.

Paul prays for the filling because the indwelling alone, without the ongoing experience of the fullness, is the theological equivalent of a furnished house you never fully live in. The furniture is real. The rooms are prepared. But the life that was meant to animate the space has not yet been fully entered.

*“The Spirit-filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is the normal Christian life as God intended it from the beginning.”*

— **A.W. Tozer, How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit**

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## **Section 6.2 — Be Being Filled: The Present Passive Imperative**

*“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”* —  
**Ephesians 5:18 (NASB)**

**The Greek verb in Ephesians 5:18 is three words in English — ‘be filled with’ — but in Greek it is a single verb form that carries a concentration of theological meaning that the English translation cannot fully convey.**

***plērousthe*** [*Present Passive Imperative, second person plural*]

Present: this is not a one-time event but an ongoing, continuous action. Keep on being filled — again and again, as a constant posture rather than a single experience. Passive: this is not something you do but something that is done to you as you yield. It is God’s action in response to human openness. Imperative: this is a command, not a suggestion or an optional enrichment for the especially devout.

Each of those three grammatical features carries weight that transforms the way we understand and pursue the filling of the Spirit.

### **Present Tense: The Filling Is Continuous, Not Singular**

One of the most common misunderstandings about the filling of the Spirit is the assumption that it is a singular, dramatic experience — something that happens once and, having happened, settles the question permanently. Many sincere believers can point to a specific moment — often at a conference, a revival, an altar call, a crisis of surrender — and say: that was when I was filled with the Spirit.

And something real may well have happened in that moment. The New Testament does describe specific, dramatic, identifiable moments of the Spirit’s filling — Pentecost itself, the filling of the early apostles in Acts 4:31, the filling of Paul at his conversion. These experiences are real, they are significant, and they are not to be minimized.

But the present tense of Ephesians 5:18 will not allow us to make any single experience the final answer to the question of the filling. Paul’s command is not “Be filled” as a one-time event. It is “Keep on being filled” as a continuous posture. The filling is meant to be the normal, ongoing, daily — moment-by-moment — experience of the believer who is yielded and attentive.

This matters enormously for the spiritual life of the ordinary believer, because the person who is waiting for a singular dramatic filling experience is waiting for something Paul does not promise. What Paul commands is something far more accessible and far more demanding: not the mountain-top moment but the sustained, ordinary, daily openness to the filling that is always available from the permanently indwelling One.

The experienced first responder does not operate effectively because they had one extraordinary experience in training that they are still drawing on years later. They operate effectively because they have maintained their skills, kept their equipment operational, and shown up consistently for the demands of the job. The filling of the Spirit operates by analogous logic: not a single watershed experience but a sustained, renewable, daily posture of openness.

### **Passive Voice: The Filling Is Received, Not Achieved**

The passive voice of *plērousthe* is perhaps the most pastorally significant of the three grammatical features. It means that the filling of the Spirit is not something you do. It is something that is done to you. You are not the actor in this sentence. You are the recipient.

This cuts directly against the performance orientation that the practical orphan brings to every dimension of the spiritual life. If the filling of the Spirit is something you achieve — something you work yourself up to, discipline yourself into, qualify yourself for through sufficient spiritual effort — then it is simply another department of the religious performance that is slowly consuming you. And the believer who feels unfilled, who longs for more of what they have seen described in Scripture and in the lives of others, will simply conclude that they have not tried hard enough yet.

The passive voice dismantles this entirely. The filling is God's action. Your role is not to produce it but to receive it — to open yourself to it, to yield to it, to remove whatever is blocking the flow from the furnace to the living spaces. The disciplines of the spiritual life — prayer, Scripture, community, the practices of surrender explored in the preceding chapters — are not the means of producing the filling. They are the means of removing the obstacles to receiving it.

The distinction is precise: you cannot fill yourself. You can only be filled. But you can choose whether you are in the posture of openness or the posture of resistance. You can choose whether the vents are open or blocked. The furnace is the Spirit's business. The vents are yours.

*“We do not fill ourselves with the Spirit any more than we fill ourselves with wind. We open the sail. The wind does the filling.”*

— A.W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest*

### **Imperative Mood: The Filling Is Required, Not Optional**

The imperative mood means that Paul is not describing an optional enrichment for those who want an enhanced Christian experience. He is issuing a command. Be filled with the Spirit is in the same grammatical category as love one another, bear one another's burdens, and present your bodies as a living sacrifice. It is not an invitation to those who find it appealing. It is a requirement addressed to every believer.

This challenges both the person who has dismissed the filling of the Spirit as a specialized experience for certain kinds of Christians, and the person who has treated it as an optional dimension of the faith that they will pursue when they have more time or more spiritual appetite. Paul does not offer either of those exits. The filling is commanded. The normal

Christian life — as Tozer noted — is the Spirit-filled life. Everything less is a diminishment of what God intends.

The context of Paul's command in Ephesians 5 is illuminating. He pairs the command to be filled with the Spirit against the command not to be drunk with wine. The pairing is not accidental. Drunkenness was, in the ancient world, commonly associated with ecstatic religious experience — the attempt to access, through chemical means, a state of altered consciousness that transcended the ordinary. Paul is saying: you were made for genuine transcendence. The filling of the Spirit produces the real version of what alcohol produces only a pale and destructive counterfeit. Do not settle for the counterfeit. Be filled with the real thing.

For the first responder who has watched colleagues turn to alcohol to manage the accumulated weight of the job — who has seen the trajectory from a drink after the bad call to a dependency that compounds the damage — this pairing carries particular pastoral weight. The human need that alcohol is being recruited to meet is real. The need for transcendence, for something that takes the edge off the weight of what you carry, for an experience that gives you access to something beyond the grinding ordinariness of the difficult life — that need is genuine and God-given. But it was made to be met by the filling of the Spirit, not by what can be poured from a bottle.

### **What Blocks the Filling**

If the filling is always available — if the Spirit is permanently present and the fullness of God is always accessible through the indwelling One — then the question is not whether the filling is available but what prevents it from being experienced.

The New Testament identifies several conditions that grieve or quench the Spirit's work in the believer — that close the vents, in the earlier image, and prevent the warmth from reaching the living spaces.

Unconfessed sin is the most obvious. Not sin itself — the presence of sin does not revoke the indwelling, as the Corinthian letters make abundantly clear. But the unconfessed, unaddressed, unrepented sin that we carry into our daily life with the willful intention of keeping it there creates a specific kind of interior blockage. Not a moral blockage in the sense of making us unworthy of the Spirit's presence — we were never worthy to begin with. A relational blockage: the posture of deliberate concealment is incompatible with the posture of openness that receiving the filling requires.

Unresolved unforgiveness is closely related. The person who is carrying the weight of a genuine grievance — who has been genuinely wronged and is holding that wrong with the grip of someone who intends to hold it indefinitely — is not in the posture of the open hand

that receives the filling. Their interior is occupied by something that crowds out the experience of the One who is always present within.

Sustained self-reliance is perhaps the subtlest blocker. The believer who is managing their life well — who is coping effectively, performing adequately, maintaining the appearance of spiritual health — is often the least aware of their need for the filling. They have learned to run the operation on the reserves of competence and discipline and personality that were present before the Spirit took up residence, and those reserves have not yet run dry. The filling is available to them. But their openness to receiving it is reduced by the success of the alternative system.

Anxiety is the fourth blocker, and the one most endemic to the first responder community. The person whose nervous system is chronically activated by sustained exposure to trauma and pressure develops an interior state that is, structurally, resistant to the receptive stillness that the filling of the Spirit tends to require. This is not a moral failing. It is a physiological reality with spiritual consequences. The person who cannot be still — who cannot quiet the alarm system long enough to receive what is being offered — needs pastoral care that addresses the physiological as well as the spiritual dimension of their condition.

The treatment for all of these blockers is not primarily effort. It is the practices of surrender that Chapter 4 described, the abiding of Chapter 5, and the honest, unhurried presence before God that creates the conditions of openness. You cannot force the filling. But you can get out of its way.

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### **Section 6.3 — The Power That Works Within**

*“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” — Ephesians 3:20–21 (NASB)*

**The doxology that closes Paul’s great prayer in Ephesians 3 is one of the most quoted passages in the New Testament.**

It appears on greeting cards and in wedding toasts and at the end of sermons about the greatness of God. The phrase “far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” has become a kind of spiritual idiom — a way of pointing toward the limitlessness of God’s capacity to exceed our expectations.

This is not wrong. But the familiarity has, for many readers, smoothed over the specific, structural, theologically precise claim that Paul is making — a claim that, when heard clearly, is far more specific and far more demanding than the general assurance that God can do more than we expect.

The claim is in a single phrase that is almost always passed over too quickly: according to the power that works within us.

### **The Location of the Power**

Paul does not locate the source of God’s “far more abundantly” in heaven. He does not locate it in the church as an institution, or in the accumulated prayers of the faithful, or in some reservoir of divine power that is available in principle but not specifically located anywhere.

He locates it within us.

Kata ten dynamin ten energoumenen en hemin. According to the power that is energetically at work in us. The preposition is en again — the same preposition that appears in en hymin of Colossians 1:27. Not near us. Not available to us from a distance. In us. Working in us. Energetically active, right now, in the interior of the ordinary human beings who are reading this letter.

The word Paul uses for power is dynamis — the word from which we get “dynamic,” “dynamo,” “dynamite.” It is explosive capacity. Not potential that has not yet been activated. Active, present, energetically operative power. And Paul specifies what this power is the same power as elsewhere in his letters:

*“...and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead...” — Ephesians 1:19–20 (NASB)*

The power that raised Jesus from the dead. That specific power — the power that reversed the most permanent and non-negotiable condition in human experience, the power that broke the iron grip of death itself and produced from a sealed tomb a living, glorified, imperishable human body — is the power that is currently, actively, energetically at work within you.

This is not inspirational rhetoric. This is Paul’s specific, considered, theologically precise claim about the nature of the power available to every believer through the indwelling of the Spirit. And if it is true — if the resurrection power of the living God is genuinely, actively, presently at work within you — then every assessment of your situation that does not account for this fact is operating with incomplete data.

## **Far More Abundantly: The Scale of the Promise**

With that understanding of where the power is located, we can hear the “far more abundantly” of Ephesians 3:20 in its full register.

The Greek is *hyperekperissou* — a compound of three words, each of which already carries the sense of excess and abundance. *Huper* (beyond, surpassing), *ek* (out of, from), *perissou* (abundant, overflowing). Paul stacks them together — beyond-out-of-overflowing — to create a word that strains at the limits of its own capacity to describe excess. There is no adequate English equivalent. “Far more abundantly” is the translators’ best effort, but it does not quite capture the deliberate extravagance of what Paul is reaching for.

And all of this excess, all of this beyond-beyond-overflowing capacity, is calibrated not to God’s theoretical omnipotence but to the actual power that is already at work within the people Paul is addressing. The measure of the “far more abundantly” is the *dynamis* that is already present and active in the interior of the believer.

Which means the limiting factor is not God’s willingness or God’s capacity. The limiting factor is the believer’s openness to receiving and cooperating with what is already there.

*“God’s ‘far more abundantly’ is not a promise about what he might do someday from a great distance. It is a promise about what the power already within you is capable of producing when it is not blocked by unbelief, unconfessed sin, or the stubborn preference for self-management.”*

— F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*

### **The Practical Question: How Is This Power Accessed?**

The question that Paul’s doxology raises for the ordinary believer is an honest and important one: if resurrection power is genuinely, actively at work within me, why does my life not look more like what that power should produce? Why am I still as anxious, as reactive, as prone to the same failures, as limited in my capacity to love and serve and persevere?

This is not a faithless question. It is the question of someone who has heard the promise seriously enough to be troubled by the gap between the promise and the experience. And it deserves a serious pastoral answer.

The answer has two parts.

The first part is the answer this chapter has been building toward: the *dynamis* is available in proportion to the believer’s openness to the filling. The power is there. Whether it is flowing through the believer’s life in a way that is visible and transforming and productive is

partly a function of whether the vents are open — whether the conditions of surrender, attentiveness, and ongoing yielding that allow the Spirit’s filling to be experienced and expressed are in place.

This is not the whole answer, and it would be pastorally irresponsible to leave it here, because it risks landing as another demand: if your life doesn’t look like resurrection power, you haven’t surrendered enough. That is not what Paul is saying. The filling is a gift, and gifts are not received by redoubling effort.

The second part of the answer is formation: the power that is at work within us operates through a process of formation that has its own pace and its own seasons, and that process is not always visible in the short term. The resurrection was not instantaneous in the sense of being casual — it was the culmination of a process that involved Incarnation, ministry, suffering, death, and three days in the tomb. The same power that raised Jesus does not always produce immediate, dramatic, identifiable results in the believer’s life. It works. It is working. But it is working in the way that a craftsman works a piece of furniture — layer by layer, from the inside out, at a pace that may frustrate the person who wants to see the finished product immediately.

The invitation of Ephesians 3:20 is not to achieve the “far more abundantly” through greater effort. It is to trust that the power is real, that it is active, that it is producing something — and to cooperate with its work through the practices of surrender and attentiveness that keep the interior landscape open to what is already there.

### **The Doxology: Glory in the Church**

Paul’s doxology does not end with the individual. It ends with the church. To him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.

The “far more abundantly” of Ephesians 3:20 is not only personal. It is communal and missional. The power that works within individual believers is the power that, when those believers are gathered into the community of the church, produces something visible and compelling in the world: a community of people in whom the resurrection is not merely a past event or a future hope but a present, daily, overflowing reality.

This is the bridge into Movement III, which we will cross in the next chapter. The indwelling Christ and the filling of the Spirit are not private experiences to be cultivated in the quiet of personal devotion, then set aside when the believer enters the world. They are the source of a life that is, by its very nature, visible — a fragrance that spreads, a letter that is read by everyone, a light that cannot be hidden under a bowl.

The power that works within us is not for us alone. It is for the world that Paul prays the glory would reach to all generations forever.

That is where we are going next.

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### **On His Knees for You**

**Return to the image with which this chapter began: Paul on his knees.**

He is not on his knees because the situation is desperate. He is on his knees because the reality he is about to pray into is so large, so staggering, so far beyond what ordinary language can adequately contain, that standing simply feels insufficient. He is bowing before the scale of what he is asking.

He is asking that you would be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Not that you would have enough. Not that you would get by. Not that you would maintain adequate spiritual function for the demands of your life. That you would be filled — plērousthe, keep on being filled, continuously, passively, as an ongoing experiential reality — up to all the fullness of the living God.

And then, having asked that, he anchors the prayer in the only thing large enough to bear its weight: the power that is already within you. Not the power that might arrive if you pray correctly or surrender sufficiently or attend the right conference. The power that is already there. The resurrection dynamis, active and energetic, working in the interior of your ordinary life right now.

The filling Paul prays for is not a distant aspiration. It is the natural, inevitable consequence of a life that is open to what is already present — of vents that are clear, of hands that are open, of a heart that has stopped insisting on running the operation from its own resources and has learned to receive what the permanently indwelling Spirit is always and already offering.

You do not need more than you have. You need to more fully inhabit what you have.

That is Paul's prayer for you. And it is, by his own testimony, more than answerable. Far more abundantly more.

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### **Reflection Questions**

These questions are designed to bridge the theology of this chapter into the actual texture of your daily experience. Answer them slowly and honestly.

- Have you experienced what the Scriptures describe as being ‘filled’ with the Spirit? What did it feel like from the inside? If you haven’t, or haven’t in a long time, what might be blocking the flow between the permanent indwelling and the experiential filling?
- What conditions tend to empty you? Be specific about your life — the situations, the relationships, the seasons, the accumulations that leave you feeling depleted rather than filled. And what replenishes you? What conditions tend to create openness to the filling rather than resistance to it?
- How does it change your posture to know that the ‘far more abundantly’ is available from within, not from some distant resource? Where in your life have you been looking outside yourself for something that Paul says is already inside you?
- Of the four blockers identified in the chapter — unconfessed sin, unresolved unforgiveness, sustained self-reliance, and chronic anxiety — which is most characteristic of your current interior condition? What would addressing it look like concretely?
- The chapter distinguishes between the indwelling (permanent, unconditional) and the filling (continuous, responsive). In your own experience, has your spiritual life been more oriented toward the foundation of the indwelling or the ongoing experience of the filling? What would a more complete integration of both look like?

*“...that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us...”*

**— Ephesians 3:19b–20 (NASB)**

## **END OF MOVEMENT II**

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*Movement III — Expression*

*Displaying Christ Before a Watching World*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT III

#### EXPRESSION

*Displaying Christ Before a Watching World*

*“The world does not need more Christian theory. It needs more people in whom Christ is unmistakably alive.”*

— Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus*

### MOVEMENT III • CHAPTER SEVEN

#### Incarnational Living

*Christ Becomes Visible Through You*

*“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” — John 20:21b (NASB)*

#### **It was the first Sunday after the resurrection.**

The disciples were behind locked doors. John’s Gospel notes the reason with characteristic restraint: “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). The men who had followed Jesus for three years, who had watched him raise Lazarus and feed five thousand and walk on water, who had heard him predict both his death and his resurrection, were hiding. The resurrection had happened — Mary Magdalene had told them, and Peter and John had run to the empty tomb and found it exactly as she described. But they were still behind locked doors.

The logic of fear does not yield easily to the logic of theology. They believed the resurrection was real. They were still hiding.

Into this locked room — through walls, through the locked door, through the accumulated fear of three days of catastrophe — Jesus came. He stood in the middle of them. He showed them his hands and his side. And then he said something that was not a commission in the conventional sense, not a mission statement or a strategic plan or a set of objectives with measurable outcomes:

*“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” — John 20:21 (NASB)*

As. The Father. Sent. Me.

That single word — as — carries an enormous and frequently unexamined weight. Jesus does not say: go and do what I did. He does not say: here is your assignment, now carry it out. He says: in the same manner, by the same method, with the same structure — as I was sent, I send you.

The method by which the Father sent the Son was the Incarnation: the placing of the fullness of the divine being within human flesh and releasing that embodied fullness into the world. Not from a distance. Not through a message delivered by a representative. Through presence. Through a Person in a body, walking in specific places among specific people, touching the untouchable, speaking to the unspeakable, being physically, visibly, humanly there.

And that is how Jesus sends us.

Movement III is about what it means when the indwelling Christ turns outward — when the interior reality that Movements I and II have been exploring begins to move through the believer into the world. When the treasure becomes visible in the earthen vessel. When the aroma spreads from the person who has been in the presence of God into the room where the person who has never encountered God is waiting — often without knowing they are waiting.

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### **Section 7.1 — The Ongoing Incarnation**

**The Incarnation is the most scandalous claim in the history of religion.**

Every other major religious tradition places God, or ultimate reality, at a categorical distance from the material world. The divine is transcendent, beyond, other. The human project, in most religious frameworks, is the effort to cross the distance — through ritual, through meditation, through moral achievement, through the gradual purification of the self from the contamination of material existence. The direction of travel is always the same: from the human toward the divine.

The Incarnation reverses the direction entirely. The divine travels toward the human. Not partially, not symbolically, not through a representative, but fully and bodily. The Word became flesh. The eternal Son of God took on human biology, human neurology, human vulnerability to cold and hunger and grief and physical pain. He walked on Jewish dirt with Jewish feet. He got tired. He wept.

This is the scandal. Not merely that God forgives sin — most religious traditions have some category for divine forgiveness. The scandal is that God showed up in a body. That the infinite became finite. That the Creator entered the creation not as its Lord demanding tribute but as a human being needing a midwife at birth and a grave at death.

And then Jesus says to a room full of frightened disciples: as the Father sent me, I send you.

### **Same Method: Embodied Presence**

The method the Father used to send the Son was not information transfer. God did not send a detailed revelation of his character and will through written documents, requiring humanity to read and comprehend and apply. He had already done that, across centuries of covenant and prophecy and law and wisdom. The written revelation was real and was not enough.

The method was embodied presence. The fullness of God took on a body and lived among human beings in a way that could be seen, heard, and touched. John's first letter opens with this insistence: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life" (1 John 1:1). The testimony is deliberately, insistently physical. Not what we have been told. What we have heard. What we have seen with our own eyes. What we have touched with our own hands.

The Incarnation made the invisible God visible. Not in a vision or a dream or a theological argument, but in a human being who sat down at tables with sinners and went out of his way to touch lepers and wept at tombs and got angry in the Temple and was moved with compassion when he saw the crowd, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

This is what Jesus sends us to continue.

*"The Incarnation is not merely a past event to be remembered but a present reality to be inhabited. Each believer is a renewed incarnation point — a specific, embodied location where the invisible God chooses to make himself visible in the world."*

**— Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society***

Newbigin's language is precise and important: "a renewed incarnation point." Not the Incarnation — there is only one eternal Son of God, and the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ is a unique and unrepeatable theological reality. But a renewed incarnation point: a specific, embodied, located human being through whom the invisible God is choosing to make himself present and visible in a particular time, place, and relational network that no one else occupies.

Your neighborhood. Your fire station. Your job site. Your family. Your circle of friends who have never been inside a church and would not describe themselves as interested in going. These are your incarnation point. These are the specific coordinates on the map of the world where the indwelling Christ has positioned himself, through you, to be present in ways that no one else can be.

### **The Sending Structure: Filled, Then Released**

John 20:21–22 gives us the full structure of the sending, and it is worth reading the two verses as a unit:

*“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” — John 20:21–22 (NASB)*

The sending is immediately accompanied by the breathing. The commission does not stand alone. Jesus does not say: here is your assignment, now go accomplish it. He says: here is your assignment — and here, in this same moment, is the resource. The breath of the risen Christ. The Spirit who is the presence of Christ made interior, made intimate, made available from within rather than from without.

The structure is incarnational through and through. The Father filled the Son with the fullness of the Spirit and released him into the world. Jesus fills his disciples with the Spirit of his own resurrection life and releases them into the world. The content of the sending is always the same: not a task list but a Person, placed within human beings and released through human beings into a world that is desperate for his presence.

The disciples who went from the upper room into the ancient world did not go armed with an argument. They went full of a Person. And that Person was recognizable in them in ways that required no argument — in the way they loved each other across social categories that the ancient world treated as absolute, in the way they cared for the sick and the poor and the marginal with a consistency that had no parallel in the surrounding culture, in the inexplicable courage with which they faced imprisonment and death.

The world did not need to be convinced that something was different about them. It was visible.

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### **Section 7.2 — You Are the Body of Christ**

*“Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” — 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NASB)*

**Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:27 is one of those sentences that the church has heard so many times that its strangeness has been worn smooth.**

We say it in liturgy. We sing it in hymns. We use it as a metaphor for organizational cooperation — different departments of the church with different functions, all working toward a common goal, like parts of a body. It is true in that sense. But that organizational reading, useful as it is, has a tendency to domesticate a claim that is, in its full register, quite wild.

Paul is not primarily making an organizational point. He is making an ontological one. He is describing what the church actually is, not merely how it should function. And what it actually is, according to the apostle who received the gospel by direct revelation from the risen Christ, is the body of Christ.

Not like the body of Christ. Not a community that aspires to represent Christ. Not an institution named for Christ. The body of Christ. The physical, embodied, located presence of the risen Christ in the world.

### **What the Body Does**

A body does in the world what the person whose body it is does in the world. The body is not separable from the person — it is the person's means of presence in the physical world, the medium through which the person's intentions, affections, and character are expressed in time and space.

When Jesus was in his physical body — the body that was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth and walked the roads of Galilee — he did specific things with it. He crossed social barriers that his culture treated as absolute and touched people who were considered untouchable. He went to the places where the respectable did not go and had conversations with people the respectable did not have conversations with. He fed the hungry and healed the sick and raised the dead and confronted the powerful on behalf of the powerless. He made the invisible visible and the marginal central and the forgotten remembered.

He did all of this through his body. And then he ascended, and his body is no longer physically present in the same way. Which means — and this is the claim that Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 12 — what the church is and what the church does in the world is now the only physical presence of Christ that the world has access to.

If the hungry are fed in the name of Christ, it is because the body of Christ fed them with its hands. If the isolated are visited, it is because the body of Christ walked through their door with its feet. If the truth of the gospel is heard, it is because the body of Christ spoke it with

its voice. The church is not an institution that talks about Christ from a distance. It is, in the most literal sense Paul knows how to use, the body through which Christ is physically present in the world.

*“Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion looks out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good.”*

— **Teresa of Ávila**

### **Individually Members of It**

Paul’s phrase includes both the collective and the particular: “you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” The body is corporate — it is the whole community of believers together, not any single believer in isolation. But it is also particular: individually, each specific believer is a member — a limb, an organ, a functioning part — of the body.

This means that every believer is a particular manifestation of Christ in a particular time and place that no one else can be.

Not every believer will be Billy Graham. Not every believer will have a public ministry, a platform, an audience. But every believer occupies a specific relational position in the world that no one else occupies — a specific web of relationships, a specific vocational context, a specific history that has produced a specific set of capacities and wounds and wisdom. And through that specific, irreplaceable, unrepeatable person, the body of Christ is present in a way that it cannot be present through anyone else.

The retired firefighter who sits with a grieving widow from his community because he knew her husband on the job and she trusts him because of it — that is an incarnation point that cannot be replicated by the pastor who has never run a call in his life. The nurse who holds the hand of the dying patient at three in the morning and prays quietly while the family sleeps — that is an incarnation point that requires exactly her history and her vocation and her willingness to be present in that specific dark moment. The construction worker who lives by a different standard of honesty on the job site and his crew knows it and they do not fully understand it but they trust him in ways they do not trust people who are only honest when it is convenient — that is an incarnation point that has been prepared by years of formation and fidelity in small things.

None of these are replaceable. Each is the body of Christ being present, in that specific location, in the specific way that requires that specific person.

*“The world at its worst needs the church at its best — and the church at its best is simply the community of people through whom Christ is living unhindered.”*

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

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### **Section 7.3 — The Watching World Is Watching You**

**There is a moment in every thoughtful believer’s life when they realize that the watching world is more observant than they assumed.**

It tends to arrive in the form of a comment that catches you off guard — a colleague who says, after a particularly difficult week at work: “I don’t know how you handle it the way you do. What’s different about you?” Or a neighbor who says, at a moment of personal crisis: “You’re the only person I thought of calling.” Or someone who has watched you navigate a conflict, or absorb an injustice, or maintain your equilibrium in circumstances that have broken other people, and who says: “There is something about you.”

The watching world is watching. Not the Sunday morning you, the dressed-up-for-church you, the performing-your-faith-in-public you. The ordinary you. The Tuesday-at-work you. The Friday-night-exhausted-and-irritable you. The you who is under pressure and responding to the colleague who is making everything harder and deciding in real time what kind of person you actually are when nobody religious is watching.

That is the you the watching world is watching. And that is the you in whom the indwelling Christ either is or is not visible.

#### **The Primary Apologetic**

The church in the post-Christian West is in the process of discovering what the early church knew from the beginning: arguments do not convert people. Presence does.

This is not anti-intellectual. The life of the mind matters, and the intellectual case for the Christian faith is real and worth making. But the watching world, for the most part, is not waiting for a better argument. It has heard arguments. It has heard the church make claims about God and love and truth and then watched the church fail, embarrassingly and publicly, to embody those claims. The credibility gap is not primarily an intellectual gap. It is a life gap. The watching world is not primarily asking whether Christianity is intellectually defensible. It is asking whether it is actually true — and by “actually true” it means: is it making any visible difference in the people who claim it?

This is the primary apologetic available to the church in this cultural moment. Not a better website. Not more sophisticated arguments. Not a more contemporary worship style or a

more culturally savvy communication strategy. The primary apologetic is the life — the actual, daily, visible, embodied life — of a community of people in whom Christ is unmistakably, detectably, genuinely present.

*“The most eloquent sermon ever preached by a Christian is the one the watching world reads in the way that Christian lives — especially in the moments when living well costs them something.”*

— **Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life**

The watching world is not primarily looking for argument. It is looking for evidence. Evidence that the thing Christians claim is actually true. Evidence that a person who is inhabited by the risen Christ is detectably different from a person who is not — not morally superior, not religiously correct, not better at presenting a spiritual identity. Detectably different in the way they are present to other people. In the quality of their attention. In the steadiness of their character under pressure. In the love that is not conditional on reciprocity. In the willingness to be with people in their worst moments without needing to fix or judge or manage.

This is the life of the indwelling Christ made visible. And it is far more convincing than any argument.

### **Your Specific Posting**

The incarnational principle of John 20:21 — as I was sent, I send you — has a specific and practical implication for every believer: you have been placed. Not randomly. Not accidentally. The specific neighborhood you live in, the specific job you hold, the specific relational network you inhabit — these are not simply the circumstances of your life. They are your posting. The coordinates at which the indwelling Christ has positioned himself, through you, to be present.

This reframes everything. When you see your neighborhood through the lens of your posting rather than simply your address, the neighbor who irritates you becomes someone in whose life you are the only person who might be carrying the indwelling Christ at close enough range to make a difference. When you see your workplace through the lens of your posting rather than simply your livelihood, the colleague who makes everything harder becomes someone in whose vocational life you are the specific representative of a different way of being human.

When you see your fire station, your job site, your truck cab, your kitchen, your recovery meeting, your neighborhood bar — when you see any of these through the lens of your posting, the secular-sacred divide collapses. There is no secular space. Every space where a person who carries the indwelling Christ is present is a space where Christ is present. The

question is not how to bring Christ into your world. He is already there. He went there in you. The question is whether the Christ who went there in you is recognizable in the way you actually live in that space.

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.” — Matthew 5:14–15 (NASB)*

Jesus does not command his disciples to become the light. He declares that they are the light — and then draws the obvious conclusion: you cannot hide it. A lamp that has been lit does not need to be told to give light. It gives light because that is what lit lamps do. The person in whom the indwelling Christ is genuinely present and genuinely operative will be visible in the world not because they are trying to be visible but because that is what the presence of Christ does. It shines. It cannot help shining. The discipline is not to shine more brightly. The discipline is to stop putting the basket over the lamp.

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#### **Section 7.4 — Incarnational Ministry for First Responders**

**There is no profession more naturally positioned for incarnational ministry than first response.**

This is not a compliment designed to make first responders feel spiritual about their work. It is a structural observation about the nature of the vocation. First responders go where suffering is. By definition, by design, as the entire purpose of the professional existence — they go to the places where human life is most raw, most desperate, most stripped of the ordinary protections that keep suffering at a manageable distance. They are already there. They were there before the theologians arrived to explain it and the program developers arrived to resource it. They are at the breaking points of human existence as a matter of daily professional routine.

When the person who is already at the breaking point of someone’s existence is also a person in whom Christ dwells — when the presence that arrives on scene is not only the professional competence of a trained responder but also the indwelling life of the One who went to every breaking point in his own ministry — something specific and unrepeatable becomes possible in that encounter.

## Jesus in the First Responder's World

Read the Gospel accounts with this lens, and what you find is that Jesus was, in the most direct sense, a first responder. Not by vocation — he was a carpenter's son and a rabbi. But by the consistent pattern of his movement through the world.

He moved toward crisis. When others moved away from the leper, Jesus moved toward him and touched him. When the crowd was ready to stone the woman, Jesus stepped between her and the stones. When the demoniac was howling in the tombs, frightening everyone away, Jesus crossed the water specifically to go to him. When the news came that Lazarus was dying, Jesus did not accelerate his journey — and when he arrived four days after the death, the first thing he did was go directly to the tomb.

He was present in the worst moments. Not observing from a safe distance. Not sending a representative or a message. Present. Bodily. There.

And his presence in those worst moments was not primarily characterized by what he said. It was characterized by what he was — by the quality of attention he brought, by the fact that he saw the person when everyone else saw the condition, by the way his compassion was not a professional affect but a genuine interior movement that Scripture describes as a physical sensation in the gut.

*“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” — Matthew 9:36 (NASB)*

The word translated “felt compassion” is *splagchnisthe* — from *splagchnon*, the bowels, the gut. It means to be moved in the visceral center of your being. This is not polite professional concern. This is the kind of feeling that gets into your body. The kind of feeling that first responders sometimes describe having after the worst calls — the ones that stay with you, that change you, that you cannot fully leave behind.

Jesus went to those places. He felt those feelings. And he was not diminished by them. He was, in those moments, most fully himself — most fully the image of the invisible God, most fully the expression of the God who has always moved toward the broken rather than away from them.

## You Do Not Leave Jesus at Home

The first responder who has not yet encountered the theology of the indwelling Christ tends to organize their professional and spiritual lives around a mental partition. There is work, which involves things that faith is not well-equipped to address — the violence, the trauma, the moral complexity of the worst calls, the accumulated weight of a career spent at the edge of human suffering. And there is faith, which involves Sunday and prayer and church

community and the attempt to maintain some spiritual coherence in the face of everything that work asks of you.

The partition is understandable. It is also, from the perspective of the indwelling Christ, unnecessary and ultimately unsustainable.

You do not leave Jesus at home when you go to work. You cannot. He is not at home. He is in you. He goes where you go. He is present on every call you run, in every crisis you enter, at every breaking point of every human life that you are dispatched to address. He was there before you arrived. He goes in with you when you go through the door. He is present in the space between you and the person on the floor, or in the burning building, or in the grip of the addiction that has brought them to this particular crisis in this particular apartment at this particular hour.

The question is not whether Jesus is present. The question is whether you are aware that he is present — and whether that awareness changes anything about how you are present.

### **The Difference Awareness Makes**

Consider two firefighters responding to the same call — a psychiatric emergency, a person in crisis, threatening self-harm. Both are professionally competent. Both have the training. Both know the protocols.

One of them goes in with professional competence and the accumulated weariness of a career that has already processed too many of these calls. They do their job. They make the appropriate interventions. They treat the person in front of them as a problem to be managed rather than a person to be present with. They do not do this out of cruelty — they do it because that is what years of exposure to secondary trauma, without adequate spiritual formation, tends to produce. The person in crisis is stabilized and transported. Another call cleared.

The other firefighter goes in aware — not performing awareness, not putting on a spiritual affect, but genuinely aware — that the One who wept at Lazarus's tomb and was moved in his gut at the sight of the sheep without a shepherd is indwelling them and is present in this room. That the person in crisis is not primarily a problem to be managed but a person made in the image of God, in the worst moment of their life so far, in the presence of someone in whom the God who made them currently dwells.

That awareness does not replace the protocol. It does not produce miraculous outcomes. What it produces is a quality of presence — an attentiveness, a quality of being actually seen rather than processed — that the person in crisis can feel without being able to name it. It is the presence of the Christ who sees people when everyone else sees conditions.

And it is not manufactured. It flows, naturally and without effort, from the awareness of the indwelling One.

*“The chaplain who knows that Christ is in them does not have to perform compassion. They have access to the real thing, from the inside, in unlimited supply — because the One who is compassion itself is dwelling within them.”*

— **Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society***

### **Your Vocation Is Your Ministry**

One of the most liberating implications of incarnational theology for the first responder is the collapse of the distinction between vocation and ministry. In the mental partition that organizes most believers’ lives, ministry is what happens in religious contexts — in the church, in the small group, in the chaplaincy program that you volunteer for in addition to your actual job. Your job is your job, and it is not, in any meaningful sense, ministry.

The theology of the indwelling Christ and the body of Christ and the incarnational sending of John 20:21 dismantles this partition at the foundation.

Your job is your ministry. Not in addition to your job. Not separated from your job by a thin line of personal spiritual practice that you maintain in the margins of your professional life. The work itself — the calls you run, the crises you enter, the people you serve at the breaking points of their lives — is the incarnational ministry of Christ through the body that Christ has chosen to use in this specific vocational context.

You were not placed in your vocation accidentally. The specific capacities that make you effective as a responder — your calm under pressure, your situational awareness, your ability to be present in chaos without being consumed by it, your willingness to go toward what everyone else is running from — are not merely professional assets. They are the specific form of the body of Christ that is needed in this specific context, doing in the world what Jesus did in the world: going toward the suffering, being present with the broken, making visible in the worst moments of human life that the God who made them has not abandoned them.

This is not a romanticized description of first response work. The work is hard and dark and takes a specific toll that needs to be named and addressed and cared for. But the hardness and the darkness do not disqualify it as a place of incarnational ministry. They are precisely what make the incarnational presence of Christ necessary and powerful in that context. Light is most visible in the dark. The presence of the indwelling Christ is most perceptible at the breaking points of human existence — which is exactly where you are every time you go to work.

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## **The Incarnation Continues**

**The resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospel of John have a consistent pattern worth noticing.**

Jesus appears inside locked rooms. He appears through sealed tombs and behind closed doors. He appears on a beach at dawn to men who had been fishing all night without catching anything. He appears in the middle of ordinary life — in the specific, located, embodied experience of specific people in specific places — and he transforms those specific places by his specific presence.

And then he sends those specific people, filled with his Spirit, back into the world.

The Incarnation does not end with the Ascension. The Ascension is the transition point — the moment at which the localized, bodily presence of Christ is extended across time and space through the Spirit-filled, indwelt, sent community of his people. The body of Christ is now the church. The incarnation points are now wherever a person in whom Christ dwells is standing.

Which means the Incarnation is happening right now. In your neighborhood. In your fire station. At your job site. In the recovery meeting where you show up every week and people notice that you are consistently there. In the family dinner where you choose patience over reactivity. In the difficult conversation you have with the colleague whose behavior is affecting everyone and nobody else is willing to address it.

The Incarnation is happening wherever the indwelling Christ is being expressed through a yielded human being into the specific world that human being inhabits.

You are an incarnation point. You did not choose the specific coordinates. They were chosen for you, by the One who has always gone to the places of greatest need. The question is whether you are aware of it — and whether that awareness is changing anything.

The next chapter asks what the world sees when the Incarnation is actually happening — and what the aroma of Christ looks like in the specific air of your specific world.

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## Reflection Questions

These questions are designed to make the theology of incarnational living concrete and specific to your actual life. Answer them with names, places, and situations rather than generalities.

- Where are you already positioned to be the ‘visible Christ’ in ways no one else can be? Name the specific relationships, the specific contexts, the specific access you have that no one else has. How does understanding this as your incarnation point change how you see those people and places?
- Is there a ‘mission field’ in your daily life that you have been treating as secular when it is actually your primary ministry context? What partition in your life is keeping your faith in one compartment and your daily vocation in another? What would it mean to collapse that partition?
- What would change if you began every shift, every workday, every routine encounter as an intentional expression of the indwelling Christ’s presence? Think concretely: what would be different about how you walk into the station, the site, the office, the store? How would the quality of your attention change?
- The chapter describes Jesus as a first responder — someone who consistently moved toward crisis and suffering rather than away from it. How does your professional instinct to move toward crisis reflect the character of the indwelling Christ? And where do you find yourself moving away from suffering rather than toward it, in ways that feel inconsistent with the Christ who dwells in you?
- The chapter suggests that the primary Christian apologetic in the post-Christian West is not argument but embodied presence. In your specific relational world, what would it look like for the indwelling Christ to be “unmistakably alive” in you in ways that your community could see? What would have to change for that to be true?

*“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” — John 20:21b (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT III • CHAPTER EIGHT

#### The Aroma of Christ

##### *Living a Compelling Witness*

*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” — 2*

**Corinthians 2:14–15 (NASB)**

**There are moments in the spiritual life that arrive not through argument or instruction but through encounter — through being in the presence of someone in whom something unmistakably real is alive.**

You have likely had one. A conversation with a person whose faith was not a performance — who was not trying to convince you of anything, who was not managing their spiritual image, who was simply present in a way that made you aware, without being able to fully articulate why, that you were in the proximity of something genuine. Something you wanted more of. Something that made the version of the Christian life you had previously dismissed seem, for the first time, worth reconsidering.

Or perhaps it was not a conversation. Perhaps it was watching someone absorb a devastating loss with a steadiness that was not emotional numbness — you could see the grief, the cost was real — but that had something underneath it, some ground they were standing on that the loss had not reached. And you thought: I want whatever that is.

Or perhaps it was simpler than that. A person in a difficult meeting who refused to take the easy exit of deception. A colleague who showed up at the hospital when nobody asked them to. A neighbor who kept showing up at your door in the weeks after your wife left, not to say anything in particular, just to be there. And over time you noticed that the showing up was connected to something, that the consistency was not personality but Person.

This is what Paul means by the aroma of Christ.

Not the testimony shared from a platform. Not the argument made in a book. Not the religious program offered to the community by a well-resourced congregation. The

involuntary, unstrategized, simply-present fragrance of a life in which the indwelling Christ is genuinely at home. The smell of someone who has been with Jesus — which the people around them can detect before they can name it, and which draws them toward something they cannot yet fully identify.

This chapter is about what that fragrance is, how it works, what it costs, and why it is, in the end, the most persuasive witness the watching world will ever encounter.

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### **Section 8.1 — The Fragrance Metaphor: Involuntary Witness**

**Paul is in the middle of defending his apostolic ministry when the fragrance metaphor arrives.**

The Corinthian congregation has been comparing him unfavorably to other apostles — more polished, more rhetorically impressive, better credentialed — and Paul is responding to the criticism with what is, by any standard, a remarkable piece of writing. He defends himself not by claiming superiority but by reframing the entire category of apostolic ministry. What does it mean to represent Christ in the world? What does success look like in the kingdom of God? What is the actual mechanism of the gospel's advance?

And in the middle of this defense, he reaches for one of the most distinctive and most precisely chosen images in any of his letters: the Roman triumphal procession.

#### **The Roman Triumph**

The Roman triumph was one of the most spectacular rituals in the ancient world. When a Roman general returned from a victorious military campaign, he was sometimes granted a triumph by the Senate: a formal procession through the streets of Rome, leading his troops and his captives through the city to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill.

The procession included the burning of incense — massive quantities of it, carried in the procession and burned along the route. The smell of incense from a Roman triumph could be detected throughout the city. It was the smell of victory, of conquest, of the power of Rome made manifest in a particular historical moment.

For the soldiers in the procession, that fragrance was the smell of life — the smell of having survived the campaign, of returning home as a victor, of being on the right side of history. For the captives being led in chains through the streets, the same fragrance was the smell of death — the smell of defeat, of slavery or execution awaiting them at the end of the procession.

Same fragrance. Two completely different experiences. Life to some. Death to others. Not because the fragrance itself was different but because the position of the person encountering it was different.

*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.” — 2 Corinthians 2:14–16a (NASB)*

Paul places himself and the community of believers in the procession — but with a deliberate ambiguity about the role. Are they the triumphant soldiers or the captive prisoners? The Greek syntax suggests something more radical than either: they are the incense itself. They are the fragrance. They are the thing being burned and released into the air, carrying the knowledge of Christ into every place they go.

### **Involuntary and Pervasive**

The choice of fragrance as the central metaphor is not accidental. Smell is the most involuntary and the most pervasive of the human senses. You can close your eyes and choose not to see. You can plug your ears and reduce what you hear. You cannot stop smelling as long as you are breathing. Fragrance does not require your cooperation. It simply is — and it affects everyone in its vicinity, whether they want to be affected or not, before they have consciously registered the source.

This is Paul’s point about the witness of the indwelling Christ. It is not primarily a deliberate act. It is not the witness you choose to make when you decide to share your testimony or have the spiritual conversation or invite someone to church. It is the witness that precedes all of those choices — the ambient quality of your presence that people encounter before you have said anything explicitly Christian.

The person in whom Christ is genuinely at home — in whom the indwelling Presence is not merely a doctrinal position but a lived, daily, operative reality — carries an involuntary witness that is more pervasive and more penetrating than anything they could deliberately manufacture. Before they speak a word about God, the quality of their presence has already been communicating something. The question is what.

*“Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words.”*  
— **attributed to Francis of Assisi**

The Francis of Assisi quotation is among the most repeated and most misapplied in Christian circles. It is used, sometimes, as a reason to avoid speaking about faith — as if

the involuntary witness of the fragrance is a substitute for explicit proclamation. Francis almost certainly did not mean that. He meant precisely what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 2: that the primary and most pervasive form of witness is not the words but the life that the words describe. The words matter. But they land in soil that the life has already prepared.

For first responders, this principle has a particular application. The person running a call is not primarily known for what they say in those moments. They are known for how they are present. The quality of their attention. The steadiness under pressure. The way they treat the patient — whether with efficiency only, or with efficiency and something more. The fragrance arrives before the words. The words, when they come, are received differently by someone whose presence has already communicated that they are carrying something real.

### **You Cannot Smell Yourself**

There is a dimension of the fragrance metaphor that Paul does not develop but that is embedded in its logic: you cannot smell yourself. Or rather — you can, with effort and attention, detect your own scent. But you are not primarily aware of it. The people around you are far more aware of your fragrance than you are.

This is both the freedom and the challenge of the involuntary witness Paul is describing. The freedom is that you do not need to be constantly monitoring your spiritual output, anxiously managing your witness, performing Christian presence for the observation of the people around you. If Christ is genuinely at home in you, the fragrance will be there without your constant management of it. You are not the one producing it. You are the vessel it is being released through.

The challenge is that the people around you are reading a text you are not always aware of. What you think you are communicating and what you are actually communicating may not be the same thing. The person who is full of religious language but whose life communicates anxiety, manipulation, and self-interest is not spreading the aroma of Christ — they are spreading something else entirely, something that the watching world correctly identifies as not the real thing. The fragrance of Christ is not manufactured by language. It is the overflow of a life in which Christ is actually, genuinely, daily at home.

This is why the Examen — the practice of honest self-examination introduced in Chapter 4 — matters for the community as well as the individual. We need people around us who know us well enough to tell us what we actually smell like. Not what we intend to communicate. What we are actually communicating, in the ordinary encounters of daily life, to the people who are close enough to detect it.

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## **Section 8.2 — Living Letters: Readable by Everyone**

*“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of human hearts.” — 2 Corinthians 3:2–3 (NASB)*

**Paul is still defending his apostolic ministry in 2 Corinthians 3, and he pivots from the fragrance metaphor to one that is even more demanding.**

Some letters of recommendation, he says, are written on paper. His letter of recommendation is the Corinthian congregation themselves — the transformed lives of specific people, in a specific city, whose transformation is the most visible and most publicly accessible evidence of the gospel’s reality. Not a document. A community. Not an argument. A life, or rather, a community of lives.

And this letter, Paul says, is “known and read by all men.” Not by Christians who are disposed to read it favorably. By all men. By the watching world that has no particular reason to accept the church’s claims about itself. By the Corinthian neighbors who can observe the congregation from the outside and draw their own conclusions about whether the gospel is making the difference it claims to make.

The watching world is reading the church. Before it reads the Bible, before it listens to a sermon, before it attends a service — it is reading the lives of the people who claim to be Christ’s. And it is a capable and discerning reader.

### **What the Letter Says**

A letter communicates specific content. A letter of recommendation for the gospel, written in the lives of believers by the Spirit of the living God on tablets of human hearts, communicates specific things about the God it recommends.

It communicates something about grace when a person who has been genuinely broken — not pretending to have been broken, not performing a redemption narrative for the sake of a good testimony, but actually, visibly, historically broken — is also genuinely whole in a way that has no natural explanation. The watching world knows the difference between someone who has pulled themselves together through willpower and discipline and someone who has been put back together from the inside by someone else. The second kind of person reads differently.

It communicates something about love when a person loves someone who has not earned it and is not likely to reciprocate it and does not offer anything in return — the difficult

neighbor, the estranged family member, the colleague who makes everyone's life harder. Conditional love is universal. Every human culture has it. Unconditional love — love that continues when there is no incentive to continue, love that costs the one who loves it without expecting return — this is not natural. When the watching world encounters it, it recognizes that it is not natural. And it wants to know where it comes from.

It communicates something about truth when a person tells the truth at cost — in the meeting where the comfortable lie was available, in the relationship where honesty creates friction, in the public moment when the safe path and the honest path diverged. The watching world has calibrated its expectations of religious people to include a sophisticated capacity for religious self-deception and public image management. When it encounters someone whose honesty is consistent rather than strategic, it reads something in that person that does not fit the category it had prepared for them.

It communicates something about hope when a person who has every reason for despair — who is in the middle of circumstances that would justify bitterness, collapse, or retreat — maintains a steadiness that is not denial and not performance but something that seems to be coming from a source the circumstances have not been able to reach. The watching world is paying attention to how the people around them handle the worst things. When it sees someone handle the worst things well — not effortlessly, not without visible cost, but with a quality underneath the struggle that suggests they are standing on ground the struggle cannot undermine — it reads something it wants to understand.

*“The most powerful witness the church possesses is not its argument but its existence — the actual, visible, embodied community of people in whom the gospel is making an observable difference.”*

— **Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society***

### **Written by the Spirit, Not by Ink**

Paul's contrast between ink and the Spirit — between stone tablets and human hearts — is drawing explicitly on the language of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, the great prophetic promises of the new covenant. The new covenant would not produce an external code inscribed on stone but an interior transformation inscribed on the living tissue of the human heart by the Spirit of God.

This means that the letter of recommendation Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 3 cannot be forged. It cannot be written by human effort, by religious discipline, by the careful management of a Christian brand. The Spirit writes it or it does not exist. And the Spirit writes it in proportion to the degree that the believer is yielded to the indwelling Presence —

in proportion to the daily, renewable, inside-out experience of the filling that Chapter 6 explored.

This is both the most relieving and the most challenging aspect of Paul’s metaphor. Relieving because it means you do not have to manufacture the witness. You cannot manufacture it. The Spirit writes the letter. Your job is to stay yielded enough that the Spirit has something to write with. Challenging because the quality of the letter is a direct reflection of the quality of your yielding — and if the letter is being read by everyone, then the quality of your yielding is a matter of public consequence, not merely private spiritual concern.

The person who has been genuinely transformed by the indwelling Christ — whose identity, whose relational patterns, whose response to suffering and failure and conflict has been genuinely changed from the inside out — is a letter that the watching world reads with attention. The person who carries the vocabulary of transformation without the substance of it is a letter that the watching world reads with exactly the skepticism it has learned to bring to all religious claims.

The watching world is a better reader than we assume. It has been reading us for a long time.

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### **Section 8.3 — Authenticity Is the New Apologetics**

**There is a specific form of witness that the post-Christian world cannot dismiss, because it cannot be explained by the categories the post-Christian world uses to dismiss religious claims.**

It is not the well-constructed argument, though arguments have their place. The post-Christian world has heard arguments. It has seen the arguments contested and the contested arguments responded to and the responses challenged, and it has concluded that the argument game is a game that religious people play among themselves and that its outcome is indeterminate. Arguments do not convert the post-Christian world. They bounce off it.

It is not the impressive program. The post-Christian world has watched well-resourced congregations build impressive programs — excellent music, professional production, culturally sophisticated communication, community initiatives with measurable impact. It is impressed by the quality of the production and skeptical of the difference it makes. Programs look like organizations. And organizations, the post-Christian world has learned, tend to serve themselves as much as they serve their stated mission.

What the post-Christian world cannot dismiss — what it has no adequate category for, what it encounters and finds itself drawn toward without fully understanding why — is the person in whom the gospel is visibly, specifically, non-performatively real.

### **The Person the World Has No Category For**

The post-Christian world has very good categories for religious performance. It recognizes the person who is kind in religious contexts and cutting in ordinary ones. It recognizes the person whose generosity is strategic and whose love is conditional on reciprocity. It recognizes the person who talks about grace and practices judgment, who preaches forgiveness and nurses grievances, who performs humility as a form of status management.

These performances are recognizable because they follow the same pattern as every other human attempt at impression management. They are shaped by the audience and the desired outcome. They wear down under pressure. They disappear when nobody religious is watching.

The person the post-Christian world has no category for is the one in whom the grace is not a performance but a nature. The one who is genuinely kind to people who cannot return the kindness. The one who forgives in a way that is costly and complete and not dependent on the other person's response. The one who is honest in small things when dishonesty would serve them better. The one who, when they have failed — and they fail, visibly, without pretending otherwise — responds to their own failure with neither self-flagellation nor defensive excuse but with the quiet confidence of someone who knows they are loved regardless.

This person cannot be explained by the standard post-Christian taxonomy of religious motivation. They do not fit the category of the person performing virtue for social reward, because their virtue does not produce social reward — it often produces friction. They do not fit the category of the person using religion as a coping mechanism, because their faith is not most visible in the moments of personal crisis but in the ordinary moments when no coping is required. They are simply, consistently, detectably different from what they would be if Christ were not living in them.

And the watching world notices. It does not always have words for what it is noticing. But it notices.

### **The Broken and Restored**

There is a specific version of the authentic witness that carries particular weight in the current cultural moment: the person who has been genuinely broken and is genuinely restored.

Not the person with the polished testimony — the dramatic conversion narrative with the clear before-and-after, the rock bottom that led to the mountaintop, the story that has been told so many times it has taken on the quality of a rehearsed performance. The watching world is skeptical of polished testimonies, because polished testimonies look like marketing. They have been used to sell things before.

The person who carries weight in the current cultural moment is the person whose brokenness is still visible — who has not managed their damage into a product, who has not resolved the tension between what they were and what they are into a neat narrative arc, who is still in the middle of the restoration rather than standing at the destination and pointing back.

The person who says: I am still being restored. I still struggle with the thing I always struggled with. I am not past it. But there is something underneath the struggle now that was not there before. Something that was not there when I was managing it alone. And I cannot fully explain what it is, but I can tell you it has a name.

This witness is not impressive in the conventional sense. It does not have the production quality of a polished platform testimony. But it has something more valuable than production quality: it has the ring of truth. And the watching world — which has developed a finely calibrated detector for the difference between the ring of truth and the ring of performance — can hear the difference.

*“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.”*

**— Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life**

Francis de Sales’ paradox describes the quality of witness that Paul is pointing toward in 2 Corinthians 2–3. The strength of the indwelling Christ expressed through a yielded human being does not look like the strength the world recognizes as strength. It looks like gentleness. Like the willingness to be present in the painful place without needing to fix it or leave it. Like the capacity to absorb provocation without retaliation. Like the steadiness that comes not from personal toughness but from standing on ground that the situation cannot undermine.

And this gentleness — because it is not natural, because it does not come from willpower or discipline or the suppression of a more aggressive impulse but from something interior and inexhaustible — reads as strength to the watching world. The kind of strength it has not

seen enough of. The kind it cannot produce from its own resources. The kind it wants, when it encounters it, to understand.

### **The Post-Christian World Is Hungry**

One of the most important things to say about the watching world is that it is hungry. Not for religion — it has had religion and found it insufficient. But for reality. For something true. For an encounter with a Person rather than a position. For evidence that the thing Christians claim — that God is real, that love is not merely social strategy, that grace is not merely sentiment, that death is not the final word — is actually true in the lived experience of actual human beings.

The hunger is real. And it is being fed, in the absence of the genuine article, by a thousand counterfeits: by the communities that offer belonging without transformation, by the ideologies that offer purpose without grace, by the spiritual practices that offer interior experience without the interior Person.

The aroma of Christ — the genuine fragrance of a life in which the indwelling One is actually at home — reaches this hunger before the argument reaches the intellect. It says, without words: there is something here worth investigating. There is something here that is real.

The invitation of authentic witness is not a program for evangelism. It is the natural, involuntary, impossible-to-manufacture consequence of actually living from the indwelling Christ. You do not have to strategize the fragrance. You have to attend to the One who is its source.

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### **Section 8.4 — When the Fragrance Costs You Something**

**Paul does not leave the fragrance metaphor in its comfortable dimension.**

He extends it into territory that most treatments of the Christian witness prefer to avoid:

*“...to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” — 2 Corinthians 2:16 (NASB)*

The fragrance of Christ is not universally welcomed. To those who are being saved, Paul says, it is an aroma from life to life — it draws them toward the source, it creates the hunger for more, it opens them to the reality the fragrance is communicating. But to those who are perishing, the same fragrance is an aroma from death to death. It does not draw them. It repels them. The same presence that is compelling to one person is threatening to another.

This is an honest and necessary thing to say about authentic witness, and Paul says it without apology. The life of the indwelling Christ, genuinely expressed in the world, is not neutral. It does not simply add a pleasant spiritual dimension to every relationship. It creates a response — and sometimes that response is rejection rather than attraction, hostility rather than hunger.

### **Why the Fragrance Disturbs**

Holiness creates friction. Not the performed holiness of religious self-presentation — that creates a different kind of friction, the friction of irritation at hypocrisy. Genuine holiness. The holiness that is the natural overflow of a life inhabited by the Holy One.

It creates friction because genuine holiness is, by its very nature, a living commentary on the lives around it. Not a spoken commentary — the person of genuine holiness is rarely the one pronouncing judgment on others. But a visible one. When the indwelling Christ is genuinely expressed through a human being, the quality of their love, their honesty, their steadiness, their freedom from the anxious self-protection that governs most human interaction — all of it is visible. And its visibility is, for some people, deeply uncomfortable.

The person who is managing their own life through self-interest and relational strategy and the careful management of what others know about them finds it uncomfortable to be around someone in whom those strategies are visibly unnecessary. Not because the holy person is judging them. But because the presence of the real thing makes the substitute feel insufficient in a way that it was not feeling insufficient before.

The person who has organized their life around the premise that love is transactional finds it destabilizing to encounter someone whose love is not. The premise has been working, more or less, and encountering its refutation in a living person requires either a revision of the premise or a rejection of the person.

The person who has made peace with their own compromise finds it difficult to be around someone who has not made that peace, not because the uncomfortable person is moralistic or judgmental, but simply because the quality of their presence makes the compromise visible in a way that was previously manageable.

This is the aroma from death to death. Not that the believer has done anything wrong. Not that the witness has been conducted badly. But that the reality of Christ in a person creates a response in some people that is not openness but resistance — and that resistance can express itself as hostility, as dismissal, as the deliberate effort to locate a flaw in the witness that will make the discomfort manageable.

### **The Cost of Consistency**

The most common form of the cost of authentic witness is not dramatic. It is the cost of consistency over time in relationships that are not reciprocating.

The person who loves a difficult family member consistently, across years of that love not being returned or appreciated or even acknowledged, who keeps showing up and keeps being present and keeps offering grace without demanding gratitude — this is the cost of authentic witness that most believers are called to, and it is more wearing than the dramatic moment of public persecution.

The first responder who maintains a different standard of honesty and care on the job when the culture of the job is pushing in a different direction — who refuses to go along with the cutting humor, the casual dehumanization of the people being served, the shared cynicism that is the common coping mechanism of a difficult vocation — pays a specific social cost. The cost of not fitting entirely into the culture that surrounds them. The cost of being a slightly alien presence in the environment where they spend the majority of their waking hours.

This is not dramatic suffering. It is the daily friction of being a person in whom Christ is genuinely at home, in a world that does not always welcome his presence. And it is real. And it deserves to be named honestly rather than spiritualized into something that sounds more impressive than it actually feels in the ordinary daily experience of living it.

*“The cross is not primarily a symbol of suffering. It is the shape of the life that love requires in a world that is not yet fully redeemed.”*

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship**

### **What the Cost Teaches**

Paul’s response to the cost of authentic witness is not to recommend a better strategy for managing the reception. It is not to suggest that if you present the fragrance more skillfully, fewer people will find it offensive. His response is a question: “And who is adequate for these things?”

The answer he implies, throughout the argument that follows in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, is: no one, in themselves, is adequate for these things. The adequacy is not yours. It is God’s. The fragrance is not manufactured by you. The letter is not written by you. The aroma from death to death and from life to life is not the product of your witness strategy. It is the product of the Spirit of the living God working through the yielded vessel of your embodied humanity.

The cost of authentic witness is the cost of being that vessel — of being present in the world as someone through whom Christ is moving, without being able to control the

response of the world to his presence. You do not get to choose which people find you an aroma of life and which find you an aroma of death. You get to choose whether you are yielded enough that the fragrance is genuine.

And the cost of that yielding — the cost of the consistency, the honesty, the love that does not protect itself, the presence in the difficult places that requires something real from you — that cost is itself a form of participation in what Paul, in Colossians 1:24, calls filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Not that Christ's suffering was insufficient — it was and is eternally complete. But the body of Christ in the world participates in the shape of the life that Christ lived: the life that went toward suffering rather than away from it, that loved without guarantee of return, that was a fragrance wherever it went, to the life of some and the discomfort of others.

This is the shape of incarnational witness. It is the shape of the life of the One who dwells within us. And it fits us imperfectly, because we are still being restored. But the more fully we are formed by the indwelling Christ, the more naturally our life takes on his shape. Not because we are trying to be like him. Because he is living through us.

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### **The Most Persuasive Thing in the World**

**The most persuasive thing in the world is not an argument.**

It is a person. A specific, embodied, historically located, genuinely transformed person in whom the presence of the living Christ is so real that it is perceptible to the people around them before they have said anything explicitly Christian.

The watching world has been argued at. It has been programmed at and marketed at and evangelized at with every technique that the combined ingenuity of two thousand years of Christian mission has been able to devise. And it remains, in the post-Christian West, largely unmoved.

What it has not been sufficiently encountered with is the fragrance. The aroma from life to life. The letter written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. The body of Christ being recognizably the body of Christ in the specific places where the body is posted — the job sites and the fire stations and the recovery meetings and the hospital wards and the dinner tables and the neighborhood streets.

You cannot manufacture this. You cannot produce it through a more sophisticated witness strategy. You cannot create it by trying harder to be a better Christian. It is the natural, inevitable, involuntary overflow of a life in which the indwelling Christ is genuinely at home

— a life that has learned, through the practices of surrender and abiding and the ongoing experience of being filled, to live from the inside out.

The fragrance is his. The vessel is yours. The most compelling witness you will ever offer the watching world is not what you say about Christ. It is what Christ does through you when you stop insisting on running the operation from your own resources and learn to live, day by day, from the One who is already within.

That is the aroma of Christ. It is already in you. The question is whether the world around you is beginning to smell it.

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### **Reflection Questions**

These questions require honesty and, for the first one, the courage to ask someone else. Don't read past them quickly.

- What does your 'fragrance' communicate to the people around you? Not what you intend to communicate — what do you actually communicate in the ordinary moments of your ordinary life? Ask someone who knows you well and trusts you enough to be honest. Then sit with what they say.
- In what relationship or context is the indwelling Christ most visibly expressed in your life right now? Where are you most naturally, most consistently, most authentically the aroma of Christ? And where is that aroma most absent? What is the difference between those two contexts?
- Have you ever experienced the cost of authentic witness — the friction that comes from being a person in whom Christ is genuinely at home in a context that does not welcome his presence? What did that experience teach you about Christ? About yourself? About the shape of the life you are being formed into?
- The chapter describes the 'broken and restored' person as carrying particular weight in the current cultural moment. Where in your own story is the restoration still visible — where are you still in the middle of being restored rather than standing at the destination? How might that ongoing restoration be the most authentic witness you carry?

- Paul’s question — ‘And who is adequate for these things?’ — is worth sitting with. Where in your life do you feel most inadequate for the witness you are called to? And what does it mean that the adequacy is not yours but God’s — that the fragrance is his, and the vessel is yours?

*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.” — 2 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT III • CHAPTER NINE

#### Bearing One Another

*The Community of the Indwelling Christ*

*“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” — Galatians 6:2 (NASB)*

**There is a particular kind of loneliness that is almost unique to the world of first response.**

It is not the loneliness of isolation. First responders are almost never alone. The station is a communal environment. The shift runs together. The calls are responded to together. The hours between calls are spent in the particular intimacy of people who share a building and a mission and a history of having seen things together that cannot be fully explained to people who were not there.

And yet beneath the communal surface, many first responders carry a loneliness that the communal surface does not touch. The loneliness of being unable to bring the full weight of what they carry into any relationship they have. The loneliness of the person who has learned that certain things are not discussable at home because they disturb the people they love, and are not discussable at the station because vulnerability in that culture has a cost, and are not discussable at church because nobody there has the experiential vocabulary to receive what they would need to say.

The burden is real. The community is also real. But the burden and the community do not fully intersect. And the gap between them — the space between what is carried and what can be shared — is where the loneliness lives.

Paul’s command in Galatians 6:2 — “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” — is addressed directly into this gap. Not as an inspirational aspiration. As the specific, concrete description of what the community of the indwelling Christ is designed to be and do.

This chapter is about that community. About why community is not an optional supplement to the individual experience of the indwelling Christ but is, theologically and practically, essential to it. About the specific form of community that the indwelling Christ

creates and requires. And about the particular kind of refuge that community becomes for the people who have been most damaged by the versions of community that fell short.

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### **Section 9.1 — The Body as the Fullness of Christ**

*“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” — Ephesians 1:22–23 (NASB)*

**The claim Paul makes in Ephesians 1:23 is among the most astonishing in all of Scripture, and its astonishment has been almost entirely worn smooth by familiarity.**

He has just announced, in one of the most towering passages in the New Testament, the cosmic supremacy of the risen Christ: all things placed in subjection under his feet, every power and dominion and authority subordinated to his lordship, the entirety of the created order arranged under the headship of the one who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father.

And then Paul says that this cosmic Christ — the head over all things, the one in whom all the fullness of deity dwells — has given himself as head over all things to the church. Not to the angels. Not to the principalities and powers. To the church. To this ragged, fractious, often confused and sometimes faithless community of ordinary human beings who have received his Spirit and are trying, imperfectly, to live from his indwelling presence.

And the church, Paul says, is his body. The pleroma — the fullness — of the One who fills all in all.

This is the claim that needs to be heard in its full weight: the church is the fullness of Christ. Not a container that Christ fills. Not an institution that Christ endorses. The fullness. The complete expression. The social, embodied, historically located form in which the cosmic Christ makes himself fully present in the world.

### **No Single Believer Contains the Fullness**

The first and most practically important implication of Ephesians 1:22–23 is one that cuts directly against the individualism that dominates Western Christian culture: no single believer expresses the fullness of Christ.

Every individual believer carries the indwelling Christ. This has been the foundational claim of this book from the beginning. Christ in you — the particular, specific, irreplaceable you — is the mystery of the ages, the hope of glory, the most astonishing reality in the universe. This is true.

But the Christ who dwells in you is the Christ who is also dwelling in every other believer around you. And the particular expression of Christ in you — the gifts, the temperament, the history, the calling, the specific form of grace that has been worked into your particular life — is not the whole of Christ. It is a facet of Christ. One particular dimension of the fullness, expressed through one particular set of circumstances and capacities.

The man whose indwelling Christ expresses itself primarily through prophetic directness — who is the person in the room who says the thing nobody else is willing to say, who calls the community back to its true north when it has drifted — does not carry the whole of Christ. He carries the prophetic dimension, and he carries it genuinely, but the fullness requires the person in the same room whose indwelling Christ expresses itself primarily through patient pastoral presence — who sits with the person the prophet has unsettled and helps them integrate what they heard.

The woman whose indwelling Christ expresses itself through the gift of mercy — who is the person who sees the one in the corner that everyone else has overlooked and goes to them — does not carry the whole of Christ. She carries the merciful dimension, genuinely, but the fullness requires the teacher, the servant, the administrator, the evangelist, the one who gives with unusual generosity, the one who leads with unusual clarity.

The fullness is corporate. It is in the community together. And this is not a pragmatic observation about how organizations work. It is a theological claim about the nature of the church as the body of Christ: the body is complete only when all the members are present and functioning. A body that is missing members is not a whole body. A community that is missing the dimensions of Christ expressed through the members it has driven away or never welcomed is a community that is displaying a partial Christ to the watching world.

*“The community of believers, taken together, is the fullness of Christ in the world. This means that my expression of Christ is incomplete without yours, and yours is incomplete without mine. We need each other’s Christ.”*

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together**

### **The Burden of the Bearing**

Galatians 6:2 introduces the specific practice by which this corporate fullness of Christ is expressed in the daily life of the community: “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

The Greek word for “bear” is *bastazo* — to carry, to lift, to take up and transport. It is a physically weighted word. It does not mean to sympathize with another person’s burden from a safe emotional distance. It means to put your hands under it and help carry it. To

take some of the weight that was pressing exclusively on one person and distribute it across the community.

The word for “burdens” is bare — heavy loads, the kind that exceed the capacity of a single person to carry alone. Paul is not talking about the ordinary inconveniences and minor difficulties of daily life — he uses a different word (phortion, lighter loads) in verse 5 when he says each person must carry their own load. The burdens of verse 2 are the crushing ones. The ones that are too heavy for a single person to carry without being damaged by the carrying.

The community of the indwelling Christ is the community in which the crushing burdens are lifted from individual people and distributed across many. Not resolved — the burden is still real, the weight is still real, the loss and the trauma and the accumulated damage are still real. But distributed. Shared. Carried together by a community in which multiple people have access to the strength of the indwelling Christ and are willing to put that strength in service of the person who cannot bear the weight alone.

This is the law of Christ. Not a legal code. Not a set of requirements to be fulfilled by compliance. The law of the One who bore the ultimate burden — the sin of the entire human race — so that no human being would have to bear it alone. The community that bears one another’s burdens is the community that is living by the logic of the cross: the strong bearing the weight of the weak, the whole community carrying what no individual member should carry alone.

*“For I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” — Matthew 25:35–36 (NASB)*

The community that bears one another’s burdens discovers, in the bearing, what the disciples discovered in Matthew 25: that the Christ they are serving in the broken person in front of them is not metaphorical. He is literally there. The indwelling Christ in the one who carries the burden is meeting the indwelling Christ in the one whose burden is being carried. The community of the indwelling Christ is the community in which Christ is present on both sides of every act of care.

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## **Section 9.2 — Microchurch and the Indwelling Community**

**The question of what form of community best expresses the indwelling Christ is not a minor organizational question.**

It is a question with significant theological weight, because the form of community shapes what is possible within it. A community organized primarily around a large, anonymous gathering of people who share a geographical address and a Sunday morning time slot is capable of certain things: excellent teaching, excellent music, large-scale service projects, the broad visibility of the Christian community in a city. But it is not capable of the kind of intimate, visible, mutually accountable burden-bearing that Galatians 6:2 describes. The form prevents it.

The burden of Galatians 6:2 requires proximity. It requires knowing the person well enough to know what they are carrying. It requires a degree of mutual visibility that is only possible in small communities where people cannot disappear into the anonymity of a crowd. It requires the kind of trust that takes time and shared experience and repeated vulnerability to build — and that is almost impossible to build in the context of an institution where the primary weekly event is a one-directional large gathering.

This is not a criticism of the large church as a form. It is an observation about what different forms of community make possible. And what the large church often cannot make possible — and what the ministry of the indwelling Christ most requires — is the intimate, small, mutually accountable community that has enough relational depth to actually bear one another's burdens rather than simply sharing a pew.

### **The Case for the Small Community**

The microchurch — the small, intimate, mission-focused community of ten to thirty people gathered around the reality of the indwelling Christ — is not a novel innovation. It is the original form. The early church that turned the Roman Empire inside out in three centuries met in homes. In the back rooms of commercial spaces. In the courtyards of large houses. In the catacombs. In groups small enough that everyone knew everyone's name, history, struggle, and gift.

In those small communities, burden-bearing was not a program. It was simply what happened when people who knew each other well and were genuinely present to each other's lives encountered one another with the indwelling Christ operative in both of them. The person whose marriage was failing was known. The person whose addiction was reasserting itself was known. The person who had run the worst call of their career last Tuesday was known. And being known — actually known, not institutionally processed — is the beginning of being helped.

The small community makes authentic relationship possible at the only scale where authentic relationship is actually possible. It creates the conditions in which every member is visible and accountable — where absence is noticed and responded to, where struggle

cannot be managed behind the performance of spiritual health, where the person who is in trouble cannot simply stop coming for three weeks without anyone noticing.

It creates the conditions in which the specific gifts and callings and capacities of each member can be known and mobilized in response to the specific needs of the community and the specific neighborhood the community inhabits. The community that knows its members well enough to know who has the gift of mercy and who has the gift of practical service and who has the gift of prophetic honesty can deploy those gifts with a precision and a personal quality that no institutional program can replicate.

And — perhaps most critically for the people this book is written for — it creates the conditions in which the wounded can encounter Christ through human beings rather than through programs. The church-wounded person, the first responder whose career has cost them more than they expected, the person who has been failed by institutional religion and is not sure they are willing to try again — these people cannot usually be reached by programs. Programs feel like institutions, and they have already been failed by institutions. They can sometimes be reached by people. Specific, embodied, known people who carry the indwelling Christ and who are willing to be present with them in the specific reality of their specific situation, for as long as it takes.

*“The church that meets in the living room, the garage, the back of the diner — this is not a church for people who can’t do better. This is the church at its most basic and most powerful: small enough for everyone to be known, large enough to carry one another, filled with the One who is filling all in all.”*

— **Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society**

### **The Indwelling Community in Practice**

The small community organized around the reality of the indwelling Christ looks different from the small group organized around a curriculum or a book study or a shared interest. The difference is not primarily structural — the size is similar, the meeting rhythm may be similar. The difference is theological and relational.

The community organized around the indwelling Christ begins from the premise that Christ is already present in every person in the room. The gathering is not the mechanism by which Christ arrives. It is the occasion at which the Christ already dwelling in each person becomes visible to the other members, as each person expresses the specific dimension of Christ that has been formed in them through their particular history with God.

This means the gathering is not primarily a delivery system for content. It is primarily a space for mutual recognition: I see Christ in you. I need what Christ is expressing through

you. I have something to contribute from what Christ is doing in me that you need. We are, together, more complete than any of us are alone.

The practices of such a community are simple but require a quality of relational depth that takes time to build. Honest sharing — not the performance of spiritual health but the actual disclosure of what is true in the interior life. Attentive listening — the kind that does not rush to fix or advise but stays present with what is being shared long enough for the person sharing it to feel genuinely received. Prayer that is specific — not the generic “please be with them” petition but the prayer that names what has been disclosed and brings it, specifically, to the One who is already within both the one praying and the one being prayed for.

And burden-bearing: the actual, practical, physical taking up of one another’s loads. The meal delivered to the family in crisis. The shift at the hospital covered so someone can be with their dying parent. The financial need met quietly, without announcement, by people who know the need and have the means. The presence at the door on the worst days. The phone call that comes not because it is in the program but because the person making it knows, from genuine intimacy, that this is the moment when the call is needed.

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### **Section 9.3 — The Ragamuffin Community**

**Brennan Manning spent most of his adult life doing two things simultaneously, and the tension between them shaped everything he wrote.**

He was a Roman Catholic priest and author who articulated the grace of God with a clarity and tenderness and intellectual precision that very few writers in the twentieth century could match. And he was an alcoholic who relapsed, spectacularly and publicly, multiple times across the span of that same career — who struggled with addiction throughout his ministry, whose marriage broke under the weight of his disease, who knew the shame of standing before audiences that had been moved by his writing and his speaking about grace and knowing that he was, in his private life, failing to inhabit the very grace he was proclaiming.

Out of that tension came the theology of the ragamuffin — which is, at its core, the theology of a person who has been forced by the specific reality of their own failure to take the grace of God with full seriousness. Not as a doctrine about which one can be eloquent. As the only thing standing between themselves and complete collapse.

The ragamuffin theology is the theology of Galatians 2:20 lived from the inside of failure rather than from the podium of achievement. It is the theology of a person who has

discovered, in the most personal and least comfortable way possible, that the indwelling Christ is not primarily a resource for the spiritually successful. He is the only resource available to the person who has run out of every other resource and is standing in the wreckage of their own best efforts.

### **The Community the Ragamuffin Theology Creates**

The community that is built on ragamuffin theology — the community organized around the reality that the grace of God reaches the people nobody else will reach, that the indwelling Christ is available to the broken without condition, that belonging precedes transformation rather than following it — is a specific and recognizable kind of community.

It is a community in which honesty about failure is not only permitted but structurally required. Not because the community glorifies failure — it does not. Because the community has been freed from the performance of spiritual health by the recognition that the grace of God is not contingent on the performance. The person in the ragamuffin community does not need to present a managed version of their spiritual life. They can bring the actual version. The version that is struggling. The version that is failing at the things they most want to succeed at. The version that is, despite everything, still held by the indwelling Christ — not because of their performance but because of his faithfulness.

It is a community in which the broken are not placed on a trajectory toward becoming whole before they are fully welcomed. They are welcomed as broken. The wholeness — the inside-out, patient, grain-of-the-wood restoration that the indwelling Christ accomplishes — comes after the welcome, not before it. The door is not guarded by a standard of spiritual attainment. It is open, specifically and deliberately, to the person who does not meet any standard of spiritual attainment. Because that is who Jesus consistently welcomed. And the community of his indwelling is meant to have the same welcome policy.

*“The ragamuffin gospel creates ragamuffin communities — places where the broken find they belong before they are fixed.”*

— **Brennan Manning, The Ragamuffin Gospel**

This is the community that the church-wounded need. Not a community that assures them it will be different this time and then reproduces the dynamics that wounded them in the first place. A community that has done the theological work of understanding why grace precedes performance rather than following it, and has organized its entire communal life around that prior grace.

This is the community that first responders need. Not a community that asks them to perform spiritual health in exchange for belonging. A community that knows enough about the specific wounds of the vocation to be present with those wounds rather than anxious

about them. That can receive the darkness of the bad call without flinching. That can sit with the moral injury of a career that asks more than any person should have to give, without rushing to resolve the unresolvable with theological quick fixes.

The ragamuffin community is not a community without standards. Manning was not a theological antinomian — he did not believe that grace means anything goes. He believed that grace is what makes genuine transformation possible, and that genuine transformation is what the community is organized around. But the transformation is the work of the indwelling Christ, not the entrance requirement for the community. You do not have to be transformed to join. You join in order to be in the environment where the transformation can happen.

### **Manning's Contribution and the Limits of Solo Spirituality**

Manning's great theological contribution is inseparable from his great personal failure, and this is worth sitting with for a moment before we continue.

Manning struggled with addiction throughout his life and ministry. He wrote with extraordinary power about the grace of God toward the broken. He relapsed. He wrote again. He relapsed again. He was, in his own life, both the preacher of the ragamuffin gospel and the ragamuffin who needed it most.

What the arc of Manning's life demonstrates — with a clarity that is painful and important — is that even the most profound personal theology of grace is not sufficient on its own. Manning knew, better than almost anyone who has written in the twentieth century, that the indwelling Christ is the only resource that matters. He knew it intellectually, he articulated it brilliantly, he preached it from his own lived experience. And he still relapsed. Repeatedly.

What Manning needed — and what, in his later years, he found, imperfectly, in the communities that surrounded him — was not better theology. It was community that embodied the theology. Other ragamuffins. Other people who were also struggling and also held, also failing and also being restored, who could bear his burden in the specific way that only other people with the indwelling Christ can bear a burden.

This is the limit of solo spirituality. You can have the most accurate and most beautiful theology of the indwelling Christ. You can have the practices of surrender and abiding and the ongoing experience of being filled. And you will still be a body that needs other bodies. A member that needs the other members. A facet of Christ that needs the other facets in order to reflect the fullness.

The indwelling Christ is not a solo experience. He is, by the structure of his own nature — the Trinitarian God who exists in eternal community — a relational Person who creates and requires community. You are not designed to carry Christ alone. You are designed to carry him in relationship with other people who are carrying him in relationship with you.

### **A Refuge for the Church-Wounded**

There is a specific population that the ragamuffin community is particularly positioned to reach, and it is a population that is growing in the post-Christian West: the church-wounded.

The church-wounded are the people who have genuinely encountered Christ — who know what it is to be indwelt, who have been genuinely transformed by the grace of God, who have real faith — and who have also been genuinely damaged by the communities that were supposed to express the indwelling Christ and instead expressed something else. The community that used grace as a carrot and judgment as a stick. The community that had a public face of welcome and a private culture of exclusion. The community that protected its image at the expense of the person who was suffering. The leader who used the authority of spiritual oversight to serve their own needs rather than the needs of those entrusted to their care.

These wounds are real. They are not primarily theological — they are relational, which means they tend to leave the wounded person with a complicated relationship not to the theology of the church but to the people and practices of the church. They believe in Christ. They are not sure they can trust a community that claims to represent him again.

The ragamuffin community — the small, intimate, honest, grace-first, burden-bearing community organized around the indwelling Christ — is the form of community that has the best chance of reaching the church-wounded. Not because it has a better program for them. Because it is built on the theological premise that makes their specific wound intelligible and their specific healing possible.

The church-wounded person's wound is, at its deepest level, a wound of grace — the wound of having been offered conditional acceptance in the name of the God whose acceptance is unconditional. The community that is genuinely organized around unconditional acceptance — that belongs before they are fixed, that welcomes the broken without a transformation entrance requirement — is offering the church-wounded person the genuine article of what they were given a counterfeit of. And the genuine article is healing in a way that the counterfeit never was.

*“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” —*  
**Matthew 18:20 (NASB)**

Jesus' promise in Matthew 18:20 is not primarily about the minimum size requirement for a valid church gathering. It is a promise about the nature of the community that gathers in his name: he is in their midst. The same Christ who dwells in each individual member is present among them when they gather, in a way that is more complete than any individual expression. The gathering is not the occasion at which Christ arrives from outside. It is the occasion at which the Christ already within each member becomes visible to the others and, together, they express a fullness that no one of them carries alone.

Two or three is enough. Ten is enough. Thirty, gathered in a living room or a garage or a back room of a community center or the bay of a fire station after shift — this is the body of Christ in its most basic and its most powerful form. Full of the One who fills all in all. Available to bear the burdens that no single person should carry alone. Open to the ragamuffins, the church-wounded, the first responders who don't know if they can do faith anymore — open to everyone who walks through the door still carrying the weight of what the week has asked of them.

This is the community the indwelling Christ creates. And it is, in every age and in every culture, more than adequate for the world it is sent into.

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### **You Were Not Made to Carry It Alone**

**The theology of the indwelling Christ, fully inhabited, leads inevitably to community.**

Not because community is a nice addition to personal faith. Because the Christ who dwells in you is also dwelling in the people around you, and the fullness of his expression in the world requires all of you together. You are a facet of the fullness. The fullness requires the other facets. And the burden you are carrying — the specific weight of your specific life, accumulated across whatever years you have been living it — was designed to be carried by a community, not by a single person.

This is not a counsel of weakness. It is the counsel of the God who did not create human beings to be solitary. It is the counsel of the Christ who sent his disciples out two by two and who, even in the most acute moment of his own suffering, took three friends into the garden. It is the counsel of the apostle who, after his own Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ, went immediately to find the community of people who were also carrying that Christ.

The indwelling Christ is not a private treasure to be kept in the quiet of your interior life. He is a communal reality, expressed fully only through the community of people in whom he dwells together. You were not made to carry him alone. You were made to carry him in

community — to bear his weight with other people who are bearing it, and to be borne by people who have more capacity at the moment than you do.

Find your community. Or build it. Or allow the Christ who is already within you to lead you to the two or three or twenty in whose midst he is already present, waiting for you to show up and add your facet of the fullness to what they are already carrying.

The burden is too heavy to carry alone. The good news is that you were never meant to.

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### **Reflection Questions**

These questions are designed to move the theology of community from the abstract to the specific. Answer them with the actual people and communities in your life in view.

- How does your current community experience express or constrain the indwelling Christ in you? Is there a community around you that knows you well enough to bear your actual burdens — not the burdens you are willing to present in public, but the ones you carry privately? If not, what is the obstacle?
- Is there a person in your orbit who needs the community of the indwelling Christ and does not have it? Someone who is carrying a burden that is too heavy for a single person, who is isolated from the kind of intimate community that Galatians 6:2 describes? What would it mean for you to be part of the answer to their need?
- What would your ideal expression of community look like, structured around the reality of Christ's indwelling presence? Be specific: size, rhythm, practices, the kinds of people it would welcome. What is the distance between that vision and your current reality, and what is one step you could take toward closing it?
- The chapter describes the ragamuffin community as one in which belonging precedes transformation rather than following it. Does the community you are currently part of operate this way? Where is the entrance requirement — explicit or implicit — for full belonging? And how does that entrance requirement serve or hinder the indwelling Christ's work in the community?
- For first responders and others who carry the specific wounds of a high-demand vocation: is there a community in your life that knows enough about what your job asks of you to be genuinely present with what you carry home from it? If not, what

would it take to build one? And who are the two or three people who might be willing to be part of it?

*“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” — Galatians 6:2 (NASB)*

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### MOVEMENT III • CHAPTER TEN

#### Presenting Every Person Complete in Christ

##### *The Goal of the Indwelling Life*

*“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” — Colossians 1:28–29 (NASB)*

#### **Paul is in chains when he writes the letter to the Colossians.**

He is not writing from a study. He is not writing from the comfortable remove of a man whose ministry has reached its natural pace and whose circumstances have permitted reflection. He is writing from prison — under house arrest in Rome, awaiting a legal process whose outcome is genuinely uncertain, chained to a Roman soldier, dependent on the generosity of friends for the basic necessities of daily life.

And from that prison, he writes one of the most theologically elevated and pastorally rich letters in the New Testament. He writes the Colossian hymn — the most exalted portrait of Christ in all of Scripture. He writes the announcement of the mystery: Christ in you, the hope of glory. He writes the invitation to the fullness of Colossians 2:9–10, the call to abide in Colossians 3, the practical outworking of the indwelling life in every dimension of human relationship.

And then, in Colossians 1:28–29, he gives us a single sentence that is the most compressed and the most complete statement of what all of it is for:

*“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” — Colossians 1:28–29 (NASB)*

This sentence is Paul’s telos — his purpose, his end, the goal that organizes everything else. Every letter he has written, every mile he has traveled, every beatings-and-imprisonment-and-shipwreck-and-sleepless-night that his second letter to the Corinthians catalogs — all of it is in service of this single aim: presenting every person complete in Christ.

Not presenting them improved. Not presenting them better-behaved. Not presenting them successfully integrated into a religious institution or productively engaged in a ministry program. Complete in Christ. Teleioi — whole, fully formed, having reached the end for which they were made, functioning as God always intended them to function.

This is the goal of the indwelling life. And it is the goal to which this entire book has been moving.

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### **Section 10.1 — ‘Every Person’: The Universal Scope**

**The phrase that anchors Colossians 1:28 appears three times in a single sentence, and the repetition is not careless.**

Paul writes: admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. The Greek is panta anthropon — every person, every human being, the whole of humanity without exception or qualification. Paul does not say every Jewish person who has come to faith in Messiah, or every person who has reached a certain level of spiritual development, or every person who has the social and educational and psychological resources to engage with the sophisticated theology of Colossians 1. Every person.

This universal scope is not a rhetorical flourish. It is a theological claim of the first order, and it has direct and uncomfortable implications for how the ministry of the indwelling Christ is conducted and by whom.

#### **The People the Church Has Tended to Overlook**

The history of the institutional church in the Western world is, in many of its chapters, the history of a community that has been more effective at reaching some people than others. It has tended to be effective at reaching people who are educated, who are socially stable, who have enough interior margin to engage with theological content, who are not in the middle of a crisis that is consuming all available cognitive and emotional resources. It has tended to struggle with the people at the edges — the ones whose lives are too chaotic, whose wounds are too deep, whose distrust of institutions is too entrenched, whose experience of the world is too far from the experience of the people designing and leading the programs.

Paul’s “every person” is a standing correction to this tendency. It is addressed directly at the people the institutional church has tended to process rather than embrace, to manage rather than form, to reach with programs rather than with the indwelling Christ expressed

through particular human beings who know them and their specific situation and are willing to be present with what they actually carry.

The first responder battling PTSD — whose nervous system has been permanently altered by years of exposure to secondary trauma, who cannot sit still through a forty-five-minute sermon without the hypervigilance activating, who has tried church and found that nobody there has the experiential vocabulary to receive what they most need to say. Every person.

The woman carrying the wreckage of a broken marriage — who came to the church for community and found instead a community with a particular and unspoken theology of marital failure that left her feeling like a problem to be managed rather than a person to be loved. Every person.

The teenager who has never known a stable home — whose entire developmental history has been organized around the need to be alert to threat, who has learned that trust is a vulnerability rather than a gift, who has been through enough institutions to know that institutions eventually fail the people they serve. Every person.

The business leader who has everything and is empty — who has achieved everything the surrounding culture told him was worth achieving and found, at the summit, that the achievement did not deliver what it promised, who is looking for something but does not have a vocabulary for what he is looking for and is not sure he trusts the vocabulary that religion offers. Every person.

The addict in the middle of the relapse. The person in the psychiatric hold. The man who has not been to church in thirty years but remembers something from a long time ago that he cannot fully name. The woman who was abused in the name of God and has very good reasons not to trust anyone who claims to speak for him. Every person.

The scope of Paul's goal is the scope of the indwelling Christ's availability. The Christ who is available to every person is the Christ whose community is obligated to pursue every person — not with a program that is designed for a median demographic, but with the specific, embodied, relational presence of people in whom the indwelling Christ is genuinely at home and who are willing to go to the places where the people who need him most actually are.

*“The Father of the prodigal does not wait for the son to clean up and find his way back. He runs. He runs when the son is still a long way off, still smelling of the pig pen, still wearing the rags of his worst chapter. He runs. This is the scope of the every person.”*

— Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

**The First Responder as the Every-Person Minister**

There is a specific implication of the every-person scope of Colossians 1:28 for the first responder who carries the indwelling Christ.

First responders do not get to choose which calls they run. The dispatch is not filtered by the spiritual or social or psychological readiness of the person in need. It goes to whoever needs it — the person in the middle of the worst night of their life, the person whose choices have brought them to a predictable and tragic outcome, the person who is a danger to themselves and everyone around them, the person who has been abandoned by every other system and has only the emergency number left.

These are the every-person people. And the first responder who carries the indwelling Christ is already there — already at the address, already in the room, already in the most intimate proximity with the person in their worst moment — in a way that no pastor or counselor or program will ever be.

The theology of Colossians 1:28 does not ask the first responder to add a ministry to their vocation. It recognizes that the vocation itself — the dispatch, the response, the presence in the breaking-point moments of other people’s lives — is already the ministry. The every person that Paul is aiming to present complete in Christ are the same people the first responder is dispatched to serve. The Christ in the first responder is already positioned at the address. The question is simply whether the first responder knows it.

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## **Section 10.2 — ‘Complete in Christ’: What Wholeness Looks Like**

**The word Paul uses for “complete” in Colossians 1:28 is teleios.**

It is a word with a specific range of meaning in the New Testament and in the Greek of Paul’s day, and that range is worth attending to carefully, because what we hear in the English word “complete” is not always what Paul means.

Teleios does not mean flawless. It does not mean sinlessly perfect, morally impeccable, free from struggle and failure and the ongoing need for grace. The person who hears “complete in Christ” as “spiritual performance that has reached its maximum potential” has imported a meaning that the Greek word will not support and that Paul’s entire theology of grace directly contradicts.

Teleios means reaching the telos — the intended end, the purpose for which something was made. A hammer is teleios when it drives nails efficiently, not when it has been polished to an impossible standard of aesthetic perfection. A person is teleios when they are functioning as God designed them to function — not when they have achieved a

standard of moral performance that the surrounding religious culture has decided constitutes spiritual maturity.

The teleios person is the person who has been restored to what God always intended. Not the fallen version — the managed, defended, self-constructed version that has accumulated layers of damage and coping and religious performance over the original grain. The original version. The grain. The image of God that was stamped into their humanity at the moment of creation, which the indwelling Christ is patiently, skillfully, from the inside out, restoring.

### **What the Complete Person Looks Like**

Rather than offering a definition, let us try to describe the person Paul has in view. The teleios person — the person who is being formed into completeness by the indwelling Christ — is recognizable by a cluster of characteristics that are not primarily behavioral but ontological. They are characteristics of being rather than doing, of identity rather than performance.

**They live from the inside out rather than the outside in.** — Their decisions, their reactions, their allocation of energy and attention — these flow from the interior reality of the indwelling Christ rather than from the exterior pressures of what the surrounding culture expects of them. They are not immune to those pressures. But they have a source of direction and stability that is not dependent on the external environment remaining favorable.

**Their identity is anchored in the indwelling Christ rather than in performance or status.** — They know who they are in a way that does not depend on the success of their last endeavor or the approval of the people around them. Not because they are indifferent to outcomes or to relationships — they care deeply about both. But because the ground of their identity is something that outcomes and approval cannot reach.

**Their brokenness has become a gift rather than a disqualifier.** — They have been through enough and have been honest enough about what they have been through that their wounds have become the source of their capacity for compassion rather than a source of shame to be managed. They are not defined by their damage. They are, in some specific way, equipped by it. The scar tissue is real, and so is the wisdom it contains.

**They make the extraordinary Christ visible through their ordinary life.** — Not through platform ministry or impressive spiritual performance. Through the quality of their presence in the ordinary moments of ordinary days. Through the consistency of their character under pressure. Through the love that is not contingent on reciprocity. Through the willingness to be present in the hard places without needing to escape them.

This is not a picture of a perfect person. It is a picture of a person who is being formed by the indwelling Christ — who is further into the formation than they were a year ago and less far than they will be a year from now. A person in process. A piece of furniture still being restored, with some of the layers still on and some of the grain already visible and the restorer still at work on the places that have not yet been addressed.

*“Spiritual maturity is not the absence of struggle. It is the presence of Christ in the midst of struggle.”*

— **Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer**

Nouwen’s definition is the most pastorally useful one available, because it relocates the standard of completeness away from the absence of struggle and toward the presence of Christ. The person who never struggles is not more complete than the person who struggles but struggles with Christ genuinely present in the struggle. The struggling person who has learned to draw on the indwelling One in the middle of the struggle — who has discovered that the dynamis of the resurrection is available precisely in the breaking points rather than only in the comfortable moments — is, in Paul’s specific sense, more complete.

Because completeness is not the achievement of an absence. It is the presence of a Person.

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### **Section 10.3 — His Power Which Mightily Works Within Me**

**Paul closes Colossians 1:28–29 with a phrase that functions as the theological capstone of the entire letter — and, for our purposes, the entire book.**

He has announced the mystery: Christ in you, the hope of glory. He has proclaimed the cosmic Christ of the Colossian hymn. He has declared that in Christ all the fullness of deity dwells, and that in him the believer has been made complete. He has called the community to let the word of Christ richly dwell within them, to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts, to put on the heart of compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience. He has worked the theology of the indwelling Christ into every dimension of human existence — marriages and families and vocational life and the community of the church.

And now, in the final phrase of Colossians 1:29, he confesses the source of his capacity for any of it: he does not labor in his own strength. He labors according to his power — the power of the indwelling Christ — which mightily works within him.

The Greek is *energoumenen* — the same root as *energeia*, energy. The power is not passive or potential. It is actively, energetically at work. Working within. Not from outside Paul, not from heaven in response to sufficient prayer, not from a reservoir he has managed to access through exceptional spiritual effort. Within. In the interior of the man who is in chains, in prison, in the middle of circumstances that by every ordinary measure are not conducive to the kind of transformative ministry he is describing.

### **The Testimony from Prison**

The location of Paul’s testimony matters enormously and is worth dwelling on.

Paul is not writing Colossians from a position of comfort, success, or favorable circumstances. He is in a Roman prison. His mobility is restricted, his access to the people he loves is restricted, his personal safety is uncertain, his future is genuinely unknown. By every metric that the surrounding culture uses to evaluate the adequacy of a person’s resources, Paul is in deficit.

And from that deficit, he writes that he labors according to a power that mightily works within him. Not according to his circumstances. Not according to his available resources. According to a power that has nothing to do with the favorability of his situation and everything to do with the living Person who has taken up residence in his interior.

This is the testimony that makes the theology of the indwelling Christ not merely believable but livable. Paul is not describing a spiritual experience that is available to people whose circumstances are comfortable enough to make it accessible. He is describing a resource that is most clearly visible precisely in the circumstances that would exhaust every other resource — because it is when the external resources are gone that the interior resource is most distinctly the only thing standing.

The firefighter who has run the worst calls of their career and is still present, still showing up, still caring with a quality that has not been diminished by everything they have absorbed — and who knows, from the inside, that the source of that continuing capacity is not their own toughness but the mightily-working power of the indwelling Christ — this person is bearing the same testimony Paul is bearing from his prison. In different words, in a different setting, but from the same interior source.

*“The will of God will never take you where the grace of God cannot sustain you.”*

— **Corrie ten Boom**

Corrie ten Boom’s testimony is worth receiving in its full context. She spoke these words out of the Ravensbrück concentration camp — out of conditions that constitute the most extreme possible version of the unfavorable circumstances in which Paul was writing. And

her testimony, like Paul's, was not that the grace of God had made the circumstances bearable by removing their weight. It was that the grace of God had proved to be present and sufficient in circumstances that no external resource could have sustained her through.

The power that mightily works within is not a power that changes the circumstances. It is a power that is present in the circumstances, working from the interior of the person in the circumstances, producing in them the capacity to bear what cannot be borne by the ordinary human measure of human capacity.

This is the capstone of everything this book has been saying. Not that the indwelling Christ will make your life easier. Not that the practices of surrender and abiding and the filling of the Spirit will produce a spirituality that is comfortable and rewarding and requires nothing of you. But that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is genuinely, actively, energetically at work within you — and that power is adequate for whatever the path in front of you requires.

### **What This Means for the Formation Work**

The practical consequence of Colossians 1:29 for the person engaged in the work of formation — whether that means the formation of their own interior life, or the formation of a community, or the ministry of the indwelling Christ through a vocational context like first response or chaplaincy or teaching or parenting — is a specific and decisive reorientation of the question.

The question is not: do I have enough? It is never: do I have enough? The question that Colossians 1:29 settles, once and for all, is the question of adequacy. The adequacy is not yours. It is his. And his power, working within you, is more than adequate for the task that is in front of you today — not because the task is small, but because the power is not limited by the size of the task.

The formation work — the patient, inside-out, from-the-center-outward work of being transformed into the completeness for which you were made — is not work that you are doing in your own strength. It is work that the energetically-working indwelling Christ is doing in you, as you remain yielded and attentive and open to what he is doing. Your role is not to generate the power. It is to stop blocking the power. To open the vents. To cooperate with what is already, actively, mightily at work within you.

The person who reads Colossians 1:28–29 and asks “how do I labor in this power rather than my own?” has already begun the movement that the entire book has been describing: the movement from self-sufficiency toward the indwelling Christ, from self-management

toward surrender, from the exhausting effort to produce transformation from the outside in toward the reception of transformation from the inside out.

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#### **Section 10.4 — A Final Invitation: Come Home to the One Who Lives Within**

**This book has covered a great deal of theological territory.**

We have walked through the mystery of Colossians 1:27 and the cosmic Christ of the Colossian hymn. We have sat with the grammar of Galatians 2:20 and the accounting term of Romans 6:11 and the present passive imperative of Ephesians 5:18. We have explored the meaning of en hymin and teleios and dynamis and pleroma. We have moved from the foundational reality of the indwelling through the practices of surrender and abiding, from the ongoing experience of the filling through the incarnational expression and the fragrance and the burden-bearing community.

It has been, in some ways, an extended theological argument — the case for a particular understanding of the Christian life, built from the specific claims of the New Testament and anchored in the wisdom of the traditions of Christian formation.

But the purpose of all of it has been, from the beginning, quite simple.

Not information. Formation.

Not theological accuracy as an end in itself. Theological accuracy as the ground from which a person who is tired of managing their own life from their own insufficient resources can step into the reality that has been available to them since the day they first believed.

So this final section is not more theology. It is an invitation.

#### **To the Weary**

If you have been managing the Christian life from your own resources for a long time, and you are weary of the managing, this invitation is for you.

You have been trying to produce, from the outside in, what can only be received from the inside out. You have been pressing against the grain of the wood rather than letting the restorer work with it. You have been running the operation from the old control center rather than learning to live from the presence that has been dwelling in you since you first believed.

The weariness you feel is not a sign that you are failing. It is a sign that you have been trying to do something you were never designed to do — to generate by your own effort what the indwelling Christ has always been willing to provide by his presence.

Come home. Not to a new commitment or a new program or a new level of spiritual effort. To the One who is already within. To the awareness, as simple and as radical as this, that the Lord of the cosmos has made his home in you — and that the life you have been exhausting yourself trying to produce is the life he is already offering you from the inside.

You do not need more than you have. You need to more fully inhabit what you have.

### **To the Broken**

If you have been carrying damage that you have not been sure the Christian life has the resources to address — damage that is too specific, too dark, too resistant to the standard pastoral responses, too embedded in a history that does not resolve cleanly into a testimony — this invitation is for you.

The restorer's eye sees the grain through the damage. Not because the damage is not real — it is real, the gouges are real, the layers of paint over layers of paint over the original surface are real. But because the grain was always there, and the restorer has never mistaken the damage for the person. He has always seen what was underneath it. He has always been working toward it.

You are not your damage. You are not the sum of what has been done to you or what you have done. You are the grain beneath the layers, the image of God beneath the accumulation, the person the restorer has always been working to reveal. And the work is not finished because the damage is significant. The work has barely begun. And it is being done by the One who does not need favorable conditions in order to work.

Come home. Not to a resolution of everything that is still unresolved. To the presence of the One who is already in you, already at work on the places that still need work, already seeing the grain that you cannot yet see. The restoration is his project. Your role is to stop hiding the wood from the restorer.

### **To the First Responder**

If you have been running calls for years and the accumulation is real and the weight is real and the question of whether your faith has adequate resources for what your vocation asks of you is a live question — this invitation is for you.

You do not leave Jesus at home when you go to work. You carry him into the most desperate human moments on this earth, as a matter of professional routine, in a way that most believers will never have the occasion to do. The person on the floor, in the crisis, at the breaking point of their existence — they are in the presence of someone in whom the Christ who wept at Lazarus's tomb and was moved in his gut at the sight of the sheep without a shepherd is currently dwelling.

That is not a minor thing. That is the continuation of the Incarnation, carried on ordinary boots and in ordinary turnout gear and in the front seat of a rig that smells like every call it has ever run.

Come home. Between calls. In the bay. In the quiet moments that the shift provides, if you let them be quiet. Come home to the awareness of the One who has been present with you on every call — on the pediatric code and the structure fire and the psychiatric hold and the routine lift assist that was not routine to the person on the floor. He was there. He is here. And the power that he is working in you is more than adequate for whatever this shift, this season, this career still holds.

### **To Everyone**

The mystery is not complicated.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. The cosmic Lord, the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of deity dwells, the One who holds all things together — he has made his home in you. Not in the spiritually impressive version of you. In you as you actually are, with the specific history you actually have and the specific damage you are actually carrying and the specific gifts and failures and hopes and wounds that make you the unrepeatable, irreplaceable, deeply-loved person you are.

He is not waiting for you to be more put-together before he is fully present. He is not offering a partial indwelling now with the promise of the full indwelling once you have made sufficient progress. He is fully present, right now, in the full scope of who he is, within the full reality of who you are. The mystery has already been revealed. The treasure is already in the vessel.

The invitation is simply to live from it.

To stop managing the Christian life from the outside in and begin receiving it from the inside out. To reckon, daily, the death that has already occurred and the life that is already operative. To abide in the vine that is already producing the fruit you have been trying to manufacture by direct effort. To open yourself, again and again, to the filling of the One who is always and already present. To take your posting seriously — to recognize that the specific place you occupy in the world is your incarnation point, and that the Christ who dwells in you has positioned himself there, through you, for reasons that have to do with the specific people in your specific world who need to encounter him in the specific way that only you can make possible.

To bear the burdens that no one should carry alone, and to let your burdens be borne. To be part of the community in which the fullness of Christ is displayed because all the members

are present and each is contributing the specific facet of Christ that has been formed in them through their particular history with God.

And to let the formation continue — patiently, from the inside out, at the pace of the restorer rather than the pace of your impatience — toward the completeness that is the goal of everything. The completeness that is not sinless perfection but the full functioning of the person God always intended. The teleios life. The life from which the Christ who indwells you is visible, recognizable, compelling to the watching world because he is unmistakably alive in you.

This is the hope of glory. Not a destination you are trying to reach. A Person who is already within you, already at work, already sufficient for everything the path in front of you holds.

Come home to him. He has never left.

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*“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” — Jude 24–25 (NASB)*

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## Reflection Questions

These are the final reflection questions in the book. Take them seriously — not as an assignment to complete but as an honest reckoning with where you are and where the indwelling Christ is inviting you to go from here.

- Paul’s goal is to present every person complete in Christ. Who are the ‘every person’ people in your specific world — the people who are unlikely to be reached by institutional programs but who you are already positioned to reach? How does Colossians 1:28 change how you see your relationship to them?
- The chapter describes the teleios person — the one being formed into completeness — through four characteristics: living from the inside out, identity

anchored in Christ rather than performance, brokenness become a gift rather than a disqualifier, and making the extraordinary Christ visible through ordinary life. Which of these is most developed in you right now? Which is the frontier — the place where the most formation work still needs to happen?

- Paul labors according to the power that mightily works within him — not his own power. Where in your life have you been laboring in your own power when you have access to his? What would it mean to make the shift from self-generated effort to Spirit-energized cooperation with what is already at work within you?
- The book has offered three movements: knowing (the indwelling Christ), surrendering (to the indwelling Christ), and expressing (the indwelling Christ). Which movement has been most formative for you in this reading? Which is the next frontier? What is the one concrete change in your daily life that would most directly address that frontier?
- The final invitation is simply: come home. To the awareness of the One who has never left. What would it mean, specifically and practically, for you to ‘come home’ in your current season of life? What is one thing you will do differently — beginning today — as a result of what you have encountered in this book?

*“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” — Colossians 1:27b (NASB)*

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## **CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY**

*Movement I • The Mystery of the Indwelling • Movement II • Surrender • Movement III • Expression*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

## CHRIST IN ME, THE HOPE OF GLORY

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### CONCLUSION

#### Living the Mystery

*A Manifesto for the Indwelling Life*

*“The one thing you need to know is this: He is enough. He who is in you is greater than all that is against you, and He is more than enough for all that is asked of you.”*

— Major Ian Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ*

**There is a moment — sometimes it comes at the end of a book like this one, sometimes it comes in the middle of an ordinary Tuesday — when the distance between what you believe and what you are living collapses into a single, uncomfortable question.**

Not a theological question. A personal one.

It sounds something like this: Do I actually live as though Christ is in me?

Not: do I believe the doctrine? Not: can I articulate the theology? Not: have I been through the curriculum and answered the reflection questions and underlined the right passages? But: in the actual texture of my actual daily life — in the decision made under pressure, in the reaction that happened before I had time to manage it, in the quality of my presence with the difficult person and the boring meeting and the worst moment on the worst shift — is there evidence that Someone is living in me who is not me?

That question is the real conclusion of this book. Not the summary of what has been argued. The question that the argument was building toward, all along.

Because the theology of the indwelling Christ is not primarily a theological achievement. It is a daily inhabitation. It is not a doctrine to be defended. It is a Person to be lived from. And the distance between knowing it and living it is not primarily a distance of information. It is a distance of surrender — the ongoing, renewable, daily distance between the self that wants to keep managing from the old control center and the self that has learned, slowly and imperfectly and with repeated returns to the starting point, to live from the One who is already within.

This conclusion is not a summary. We have done enough summarizing. It is a manifesto — a declaration of the orientation that the person who has genuinely encountered the indwelling Christ is being formed into. Not a list of rules to be performed but a description of the person being shaped by the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Read it slowly. Not as aspiration but as identity. This is who you are becoming — not because you are trying hard enough, but because the One who is doing the forming is enough.

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### **The Central Claim, One More Time**

#### **We began with a verse.**

Colossians 1:27: “to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

We have been living inside that verse for ten chapters. We have turned it over and examined it from every angle — the mystery that was hidden for ages and has now been disclosed, the riches of the glory that are not located in heaven but in you, the hope that is not wishful thinking but confident expectation anchored in the down payment of the Spirit, the glory that is not a destination but a trajectory, a Person drawing you toward the fullness of what God always intended.

And we have been saying, in different ways across all of it, the same thing:

The most important reality in your life is not your circumstances. It is not your history. It is not your failures or your achievements or the opinion of the people around you or the assessment of your own inadequacy. The most important reality in your life is a Person who has taken up permanent, unconditional, full-scope residence in the interior of your ordinary human existence — and who is, right now, actively and energetically at work in you, toward you, through you, for the sake of the specific people in the specific world you inhabit.

Christ in you. The hope of glory.

This is not a doctrine to be defended. It is a Person to be inhabited. And inhabiting it — learning to live from the inside out, day by day, in the ordinary moments of the ordinary life — is the entire project.

*“The Christian life is not difficult. It is impossible. That is why we need Someone who has already lived it to live it again, from within us.”*

**— Major Ian Thomas, The Saving Life of Christ**

Ian Thomas's observation is the honest starting point of everything that has followed in this book. The Christian life is not difficult. It is impossible — at least, it is impossible for the self that is trying to produce it from its own resources. Which is precisely why the indwelling Christ is not an optional upgrade to the standard Christian package. He is the non-negotiable foundation of the only Christian life that is actually livable.

You were not designed to produce the Christian life. You were designed to receive it — from the One who lived it perfectly, once, in a body like yours, and who now offers to live it again from within you, through the mystery of the indwelling that is the great announcement of the new covenant.

Everything that follows from this — the surrender, the abiding, the filling, the incarnational expression, the fragrance, the community, the completeness — flows from this single, sufficient, staggering reality: Christ in you.

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### **A Manifesto for the Indwelling Life**

What follows is not a list of commitments to be made or standards to be met. It is a description — in the present tense, as a declaration of what is already true about the person who is learning to live from the indwelling Christ — of the orientation being formed in you by the One who dwells within.

Read each statement. Sit with it. Not as a target you are trying to hit but as a description of the self that is being formed by the Patient Restorer who is already at work on your interior. This is who you are becoming. This is the grain that is emerging.

***I am not trying to get Christ into situations. Christ is already in me, and I am already in the situation.***

The person who understands the indwelling Christ does not spend their energy trying to import spiritual resources into the ordinary moments of daily life. They do not need to. The One who holds all things together has gone in ahead of them. He was at the address before the apparatus arrived. He is present in the difficult meeting before the first word is spoken. He is already in the room with the difficult person, the desperate person, the person who does not know they are in the presence of Someone who knows them by name. The question is never whether Christ is present in the situation. The question is whether you are aware that he is — and whether that awareness is changing the quality of your presence in it.

***I am not striving to produce fruit. I am attending to the Vine.***

Jesus did not say: the branch that tries hard enough will bear fruit. He said: the branch that remains in me will bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5). The fruit is his responsibility. The remaining is yours. This does not make the spiritual life passive — remaining in the vine requires the full engagement of every faculty you have. But the direction of the engagement has been permanently reoriented. You are not pressing toward a standard of spiritual output. You are attending to the Presence — returning, again and again, to the awareness of the One in whom you abide and who abides in you. The fruit is the natural consequence of the connection. Your job is to stay connected.

***I am not working to earn completeness. I am receiving what Christ has already accomplished.***

The teleios life — the complete, fully functioning, reaching-the-telos life — is not a target you are building toward through sufficient spiritual effort. It is a reality that has already been established in Christ and that is being received, by faith, in proportion to your openness to the indwelling One. You have been made complete in him (Colossians 2:10). Not you will be, eventually, if you accumulate enough sanctification. You have been. The completeness is the ground you are standing on, not the summit you are climbing toward. The formation work — the restoration, the grain-revealing, the inside-out transformation — is the Spirit's expression of a completeness that has already been declared, making visible in your daily life what is already true of you in Christ.

***I am not performing for a watching world. I am being formed, and the formation is visible.***

The aroma of Christ is not manufactured by performance. It is the inevitable overflow of a life in which Christ is genuinely at home. The watching world cannot be fooled, for long, by a spiritual performance — it has calibrated its detectors too well and been disappointed too many times. What it cannot dismiss is the real thing: the person in whom the formation is actually occurring, in whom the grain is actually emerging from beneath the layers, in whom the love and the steadiness and the honesty and the willingness to be present in the hard places are not products of effort but expressions of the Person who is being formed in them from the inside out. You do not need to manage your witness. You need to stay in the formative hands of the Restorer. The witness takes care of itself.

***I am not doing ministry. I am being — and from that being, ministry flows.***

The deepest ministry you will ever offer the world is not a program you design or a service you deliver. It is the ministry of your presence — the specific, embodied, located presence of a person in whom the Christ who went to every breaking point of human existence is

currently dwelling. Your vocation is your posting. Your neighborhood is your incarnation point. The people who are close enough to be in the proximity of your daily life are the people for whom the specific dimension of Christ that has been formed in you through your specific history is most directly available. You do not need to add ministry to your life. You need to recognize that your life, lived from the inside out, is already the ministry. From that recognition — from the being that flows from the indwelling — everything else follows.

★ ★ ★

### **The Mystery Is Not Complicated**

**Theology books have a tendency, at their conclusions, to make the simple things sound complicated.**

They summarize the argument. They catalog the implications. They point toward the further reading. They gesture toward the complexity that remains after everything that has been said. And by the time they are finished, the reader may feel that the subject is more daunting than it was before they started, that the distance between where they are and where the book is pointing is wider rather than narrower.

This book has tried to resist that tendency. But in the attempt to make the theology of the indwelling Christ accessible and livable and grounded in the specificity of the first responder's world, it has covered a great deal of ground — Greek words and theological traditions and pastoral applications and formation practices and community structures and the cost of authentic witness.

So let the conclusion say, as simply as it can be said:

The mystery is not complicated.

Christ is in you. He has been in you since the day you first believed. He is there right now — in you, not near you, not available to you from a distance, but present in the most intimate possible way in the very interior of your ordinary human life. He is not absent when you are not feeling him. He is not diminished when you are failing. He is not waiting for you to clean up your act before he is fully present. He is there. He has always been there. He is the hope of glory, present in you right now, working from the inside out toward the completeness that God always intended.

The entire project of the Christian life — in all its complexity, across all the movements of formation and surrender and expression — is simply the project of learning to live from this reality. Of closing the gap between what is already true and what you are actually experiencing. Of stopping the insistence on managing the operation from the old control

center and beginning, slowly and imperfectly and with repeated returns to the starting point, to receive the life that is already being offered from within.

That is the mystery. And it is not complicated.

It is, in the words of Brennan Manning, the inexhaustible, impossible, grace-saturated reality that God became one of us in order to dwell in all of us — and that this dwelling is not a spiritual achievement available to the exceptional but the ordinary, daily, accessible inheritance of every person who has received his Spirit.

You are not exceptional. That is the point. The Christ who dwells in you is exceptional — the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of deity dwells, the One who holds all things together. And he has chosen to make his home in you.

Not because of what you have achieved. Because of who he is.

*“The one thing you need to know is this: He is enough. He who is in you is greater than all that is against you, and He is more than enough for all that is asked of you.”*

**— Major Ian Thomas, The Saving Life of Christ**

Ian Thomas says it most concisely. Not: you are enough, if you try hard enough. He is enough. The He who is in you. And He is enough not in the abstract — not enough in principle, not enough theoretically, not enough if conditions were more favorable. He is enough for what is against you right now. He is enough for what is asked of you today. He is enough for the call that came in last night and the relationship that has not resolved and the season that is not over and the damage that is not yet healed.

He is more than enough.

And he is not coming. He is already there.

★ ★ ★

### **The Last Word**

**The last word of this book is the same as the first word of the mystery.**

It is not a command. It is not a technique. It is not a program or a practice or a principle to apply. It is a name.

Christ.

Christ in you. Christ who holds all things together. Christ in whom all the fullness of deity dwells. Christ who is the firstborn from the dead, whose resurrection life is the power actively at work in your interior right now. Christ who wept at the tomb and touched the

leper and stopped mid-procession to notice the woman who had touched the hem of his garment and looked at the rich young ruler and loved him. Christ who went to Gethsemane and yielded to the Father's will and carried the cross and was raised and breathed on his disciples and said: as the Father sent me, I send you.

That Christ. In you.

In the fire station. In the apartment. In the recovery meeting. In the marriage that is hard. In the shift that started badly. In the quiet before the day begins when nobody is watching and you are just yourself, with whatever you are carrying, before the performance starts.

He is there. He has always been there. He will never not be there.

The hope of glory is not on its way. It has already arrived. It is living in you — patient, sufficient, inexhaustible, working from the inside out toward the day when the grain is fully visible and the restoration is complete and you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless, with great joy.

Until that day: live from within. Surrender to the One who dwells there. Attend to the Vine. Open yourself to the filling. Take your posting seriously. Bear the burdens and let yours be borne. Let the formation make you visible.

And when you forget — because you will forget, and then remember, and then forget again, and that is not failure, that is the ordinary rhythm of the human person being slowly, patiently restored by the Patient Restorer — come home.

He is there.

He has always been there.

He is enough.

★ ★ ★

*“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” — Jude 24–25 (NASB)*

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*“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” — Colossians 1:27b (NASB)*

***Soli Deo Gloria***