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“For twenty-two years, the greatest problem I faced was my natural desire for the world’s junk food—an appetite for empty calories and fleeting pleasures that could never satisfy my soul. Lamenting how I wasted the first half of my life, I now see what was wrong: my desires were broken. But the greatest news in the universe is that God burst into my life to change that appetite, giving me a new taste for the greatest and most satisfying good—for himself. The gospel transformed me and gave me a new delight in seeking God and the discovery that as I seek my joy in him, I simultaneously fulfil my role in glorifying him.

These are the greatest realities in the universe, and they're explained and celebrated in Daniel Hames's little book, one that can change you forever by showing you the new life, the new heart, the new you."

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"This is life—both now and for all eternity—to know the Father in the face of Christ. In this brilliant, short book, Dan Hames gets us to the heart of all reality: enjoying God. Whether you want an introduction to the Christian life or a refresher for weary souls, this will do you much good."

**Glen Scrivener**, Director of Speak Life and Creator of the 321 Course



Union

# The New Life

Daniel Hames



For my friends,  
Noah Miller and Will Hoxhallari

*The New Life*

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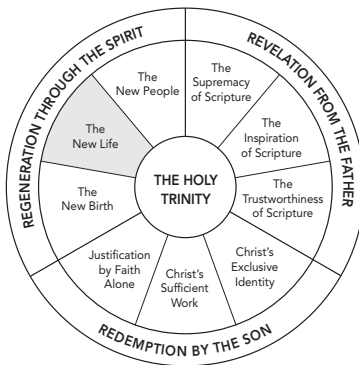
## Essentials Series Preface

Very simply, this series introduces the essential, non-negotiable truths of the gospel.

And what are they? This is how the apostle Paul speaks of the gospel in the opening sentence of his letter to the Romans:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
(Rom. 1:1–4)

For Paul, the gospel is a God-centred message: it is “the gospel of God.” It is a Trinitarian message: the Father revealing his Son in the power of the Spirit. It is a biblical message: proclaimed “in the holy Scriptures.” It concerns Christ, the Son of God, and his work of redemption. And it is a message made effective in the regenerating power of the Spirit. In other words, the Christian gospel is good news concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in revelation, redemption, and regeneration.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> This diagram was first used and explained in Michael Reeves, *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 20, 119.

These truths are all interconnected, and together they make up our beautiful, biblical, Trinitarian, Christ-centred, and Spirit-effected good news. This series will introduce, and refresh readers in, this gospel. Ten short books cover the most basic subject areas of the gospel, as shown in the two inner circles of this diagram.

Each book will introduce its own subject area, and yet the aim of this series is not merely to communicate content. The gospel, after all, is not merely revelation. It is a revelation that *redeems* and *regenerates*. And so, may you be renewed as you read, and brought to worship and enjoy “the glory of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11).

**Michael Reeves**  
Series Editor



## INTRODUCTION

# What's Holding You Back?

Picture the scene. You wake up on Monday morning and begin your usual routine. As you're brushing your teeth, you stand in front of the mirror and look yourself in the eye. What is your pep talk to yourself as you start the day?

Perhaps it's a punchy "Go get 'em, tiger!"—or perhaps a world-weary "Well, here we go again." Like most of us, your natural instinct at the start of each new day is to imagine it's an "everyone-for-themselves" world out there. Whatever the opportunities or challenges this day might bring, they're yours to make the most of ... or yours to mess up.

Then, mid-toothbrushing, you suddenly remember, "I'm a *Christian!*" Of course! So,

you must cram in some Scripture reading before you leave the house. And a time of prayer. But you might struggle to find space today. Maybe you'll have to settle for playing some Christian music on your commute to class or to work. You silently promise to look for an opportunity to do some evangelism during the day. It's all a bit of a drain, and you don't like how half-baked it feels. But you want to be a good Christian, and this is how you grow. Right?

If any of the above rings true for your experience of living as a Christian, then this book is meant to help you. In short, I want to overturn a deep-down, powerful idea that probably gives birth to the feeling that being a Christian is a slog.

Here's how it goes. We imagine that, once upon a time, we met the Lord, received our salvation, ticked the box to accept the offer, and now ... well, it's over to us. Jesus did his part, and now it's *our* turn. Now the real work begins. There's a Christian life we have get on with: Bible reading to crunch through,

prayers to pray, church to serve, evangelism to do, and (above all) we want to keep God happy. And so, even when we remember that we're Christians—saved, forgiven, bound for glory!—we *still* feel like it's all down to us.

But does it really have to be this way?

There is no simple “secret” to having a happier, freer Christian life. No knack to work out, and no trick to try. You already have all you need in order to feel that burden slip off your back. As someone once said, “Our greatest hindrance in the Christian life is not our lack of effort but our lack of acquaint- edness with our privileges.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, what most holds us back in the Christian life is not that *we don't give* enough to God, but that we don't fully enjoy what *he has already given* to us.

1 This statement is sometimes attributed to John Owen (1616–1683) but is probably a paraphrase of his words: “Unacquaintedness with our mercies, our privileges, is our sin as well as our trouble. We [do not listen] to the voice of the Spirit which is given unto us, ‘that we may know the things that are freely bestowed on us of God.’ This makes us go heavily, when we might rejoice; and to be weak, where we might be strong in the Lord.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 32.

The aim of this book is to get you better acquainted with the privilege of your new life in Jesus Christ, so that you will really, truly enjoy being a Christian.

## Kneeling at the Foot of the Cross

When we think about living the Christian life, we must begin at the beginning. Every Christian is “born” at the cross of Jesus, and we know that well. Yet we so easily forget that we are never meant to move on from the cross, or somehow “graduate” from it.

Kneeling at the cross of Jesus, we first realised the darkness of our sin, knowing that he was crucified because of it. And we saw the brightness of his love, as we believed that he had died in our place to save us and bring us to his Father. At the foot of the cross, our new life began in a blaze of repentance and forgiveness, gratitude and love, as the Holy Spirit did his first and most wonderful work in us.

But it isn't long before we feel it's time

to stand up, dust off our knees, and wander away. We start to think of ourselves as growing up, becoming better people, not needing so much help anymore. We want to be able to say that our past really *is* behind us, that we are stronger now, that we can stand on our own two feet. And we tell ourselves that what God wants for us now is independence and maturity. "Since Jesus has done so much for me," we reason, "the least I can do is give this my best shot and try to be a good Christian." No longer on our knees in dependence, we walk off out into the world alone. This drifting away from the cross is a serious mistake, for it misses the essential shape and pattern of the Christian life. But it is also very common.

#### The pattern of the new life

Of course, it is true that God wants us to grow in our love and knowledge of him (Eph. 4:15). And yes, he wants to make us stronger as the days go by (Eph. 3:16). Yet the new life that *begins* with Jesus' work for us also *continues* by his work in us (Eph. 3:20).

Our growth and maturity as Christians are not targets that we are expected to achieve. They're not even meant to be goals that we aim for with a little help from God. The way the Scriptures speak about our new life conveys something much deeper and more exciting than any self-improvement project. This is a life in and through Jesus—and following the pattern of his death and resurrection. In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes,

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Notice here the death of the old self as we share in Jesus' crucifixion, and the coming to life of a brand-new self that shares in Jesus' own resurrection life. The pattern of your new life is founded on these two steps. First, at the cross, *you died*. You were crucified with

Christ. It is no longer the old, independent, self-centred you who lives. That sinful, dying life has been done away with for good. Second, at the cross, you received new life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The old has gone, and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17). You have been “born again” (John 3:3), and your new life is actually Jesus’ own life coursing through you.

Paul says that since you have been united with Jesus in his death, you will also be united with him in his resurrection, and able, even now, to “walk in newness of life” because of it (Rom. 6:4–5).<sup>1</sup> On the other side of being crucified with Christ there is a new way of being that you could never have achieved yourself, nor even dreamed of. It is filled with fresh possibilities, new God-given abilities, and a glorious hope. Paul writes that this new life is animated by “faith,” a heartfelt trust in the one who loved you enough to lay down his life for

1 For more on being born again, see Peter Mead’s book on this theme (also in this Essentials series): *The New Birth* (Union Publishing, 2024).

you (see John 15:13). This new life can never go back to the old self-sufficiency or having to go it alone. Your new life is fuelled by knowing the love and faithfulness of the Lord, staying close to him, and gratefully receiving from him, day by day.

In other words, the Christian life is *defined* by Jesus, *centred* on Jesus, and it even *begins to look like* Jesus, in all his loveliness and goodness. It is not your own life, but his life being worked out in you. It is this way from day one, and will be this way right to the day when your race has been won.

And it will never stop feeling like kneeling at the cross in worship and wonder.

### **Not your own**

Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19–20). This is a good motto to live by. So good, in fact, that in 1563 when church leaders wanted to teach the truths of the faith, it was the first thing they aimed to press home. Believers would learn the follow-

ing question and answer, and consider this to be the starting point in understanding life as a Christian:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own,  
but belong—body and soul,  
in life and in death—  
to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
He has fully paid for all my sins with  
his precious blood, and has set me  
free from the tyranny of the devil.  
He also watches over me in such a  
way that not a hair can fall from my  
head without the will of my Father in  
heaven; in fact, all things must work  
together for my salvation.  
Because I belong to him,  
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,  
assures me of eternal life  
and makes me wholeheartedly willing

and ready  
from now on to live for him.<sup>2</sup>

It is in belonging to Jesus—with sins paid for and having received eternal life by the Holy Spirit—that we first find comfort, assurance, and confidence, and then are made willing and ready to go and live for him. It really has to be that way round. Our growth, holiness, Christlikeness, maturity, and so on will only be healthy and happy (not to mention real and not faked) when we understand that our new life is really more about him than about us.

The fact that you are not your own but his—and that your life is, in the end, not in your hands but in his—is not so much about who has control or who is in charge, but about who takes the weight and the responsibility.

Who better could I trust with my life and eternity than the one who made the stars and yet was crucified for me? What greater re-

<sup>2</sup> Question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

lief is there than saying goodbye to the me-centred life of burdens and duties and embracing life in and with Jesus?

Now it's time to explore what life is like when we live in God's love.

### REFLECT or DISCUSS

1. Why is it so important not to "move on" from the cross in the Christian life?
2. Your new life is "life in Jesus." How might this affect how you think about your growth and maturity?
3. What does it mean to you that "you are not your own"? How does this change life for you today?

## Living in God's Love

The names we use for ourselves and for others reveal so much about the relationships we share. Couples use pet names for one another that outsiders will never hear. Friends and close family members often cling to old nicknames even after the bearers rise to prominent or formal positions. It seems an honour when someone we respect or look up to knows our name, or informally says to us, “Oh, just call me Steve.”

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray—to express in words their relationship to God in their new life—he taught them to call the almighty Creator of the universe “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9). And this way of addressing God that Jesus gives them (and us) expresses so much about the life of love

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