

CHANGED

I'VE BEEN
CHANGED,
NOW
WHAT?!



VINTAGE PRESS



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**WHAT JUST
HAPPENED
TO ME?**

YOUR STORY IN THE BIG STORY

You've been changed! What an incredible experience. As you read this now, no doubt, your salvation experience is fresh on your mind. While you recognize that God has done something in your life and you are different, you probably also are having a hard time explaining exactly what just happened to you. The great thing about salvation is that you don't have to know everything for Jesus to save you. The Bible says that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). That's simple enough!

What happened to you? Write out how Jesus changed you.

Still, it's important to understand just what God has done in your life. To be able to understand what has happened to you, we need to look at the Bible. The Bible is full of great stories; however, there is also a grand, over-arching story that connects Genesis, the first book of the Bible, to Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Described by theologians as the biblical metanarrative, the storyline goes like this: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. The Bible begins with God. In fact, the first verse of the Bible says, "In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The first thing we see is that prior to any creation, God existed. What follows in Genesis 1–2 is an account of all of God's creation, from the creation of the sun and the stars to the creation of man and woman. After God finished creating, "God

saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). All of creation, including the first humans, was perfect, without flaw or defect. Unfortunately, the story does not end there.

In Genesis 3, a new character enters the story. Described as “the serpent,” the Devil, a fallen angel against God and his kingdom, joins the story. Upon entering the story, the Devil immediately begins to flood the minds of Adam and Eve with doubts. In Genesis 2:17, God commands Adam and Eve to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Tempting Eve, the Devil says,

Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Genesis 3:1–5

Sadly, when we read just a bit further, we see the first humans listen to the Devil, disobey God, and eat the fruit. While this action might not seem all that significant, Adam and Eve still disobeyed God. Because of their disobedience, they were cast from God’s presence and ultimately cursed with both spiritual—eternal separation from God—and physical death—spiritual separation from the body. And because of their sin, now all of humanity is cursed. This is what the Apostle Paul means when he writes, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

What now? How can the storyline change? How can human lives ever reverse what Adam and Eve did? The reality is that no mere human being could make right our relationship with God. Because God is perfect and holy, only God could make things right with humanity.

Enter Jesus! The story of Jesus is the story of God’s provision of redemption for sinful humanity. The New Testament makes clear that Jesus is special. As you read the four Gospels (the first four books of the New Testament), you quickly see that Jesus is both fully human and fully God. He was clearly a man who hungered, thirsted, suffered and died, but he was also divine in that he healed people, controlled the weather, and resurrected from the grave. The Bible says Jesus was born of a virgin (Matthew 1:18–25), lived a perfect life (Hebrews 4:15), was murdered upon a cross (Matthew 27:33–37; Mark 15:22–26; Luke 23:33–34; John 19:17–27), and rose from the grave (Matthew 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–13). More than that, his death and resurrection served a great purpose. The sin that separates us from God was removed by Jesus’s death and resurrection. Because of Jesus, our relationship is made whole with God. This is what the Apostle Peter means when he writes, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

Take a moment to thank Jesus for saving you. Use this space to write a brief prayer of thanks to Jesus.

The story, however, does not end there. While Jesus has brought salvation to us through his death and resurrection, he will one day bring restoration, making all things new. Death, disease, famine, natural disasters, and evil will all end. The Bible says that one day Jesus will return, this time as a reigning and

ruling king (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). When he returns, he will defeat the Devil once and for all, judge all of humanity, and restore heaven and earth. The book of Revelation says it best when it says,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

Revelation 21:1–7

HOW SALVATION WORKS

Now that you understand the overarching story, you need to understand how you fit into the story and the process by which God saved you. Before I say anything else, let me say this: salvation is a mystery! Throughout history, theologians and philosophers have sought to understand how God saves. And while Scripture does give us an understanding of salvation, it still leaves many questions unanswered.

When we think about salvation, we can think about salvation in two ways: chronologically and logically. When theologians do this, they often discuss the *ordo salutis*, which is Latin for “order of salvation.” Simply put, Scripture provides us with an order of how salvation occurs. While not an official nor complete order of salvation, the Apostle Paul does provide an order of salvation in Romans 8:29–30. He writes, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Do you see the order? 1. foreknown, 2. predestined, 3. called, 4. justified, 5. glorified.

In Romans 8:29–30, Paul mentions two important but debated aspects of salvation: foreknowledge (i.e., God’s knowledge of all that *will* happen) and predestination (i.e., God’s choice of those who will be saved). When theologians talk about these two terms they often discuss the theological term “election”. While complicated, the point is this: before the foundation of the world, God chose and knew who would be saved. While some struggle with understanding election, predestination, and foreknowledge, the Bible at least provides some clues as to what all this means. In Ephesians 1:4–6, Paul writes, “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” All of this proves one major point: we cannot save ourselves. Our salvation is first and foremost a work of God.

Why do you think it is so important to recognize that you cannot save yourself and that only God can save you?

While God's election and predestination of us for salvation is something that we do not experience firsthand, his effectual calling is something we do experience. At some point in your life, you heard the gospel: that God created everything perfect, that sin separates us from God, that Jesus provided forgiveness of sins through his death and resurrection, and through faith in Jesus and repentance of sin, we can be forgiven of sin. However, if you are like me, you might have heard that message several times before being changed by Jesus. This is why God's effectual calling, his special calling allowing humans to respond to the gospel, is necessary for someone to be saved. Again, God initiates.

Nonetheless, salvation still requires a response from us. This is where conversion comes in. The best way to understand conversion is to visualize it as a two-sided coin. On one side of the coin is faith. Ultimately faith is turning toward Jesus, believing that Jesus is who he said he was and that he died and rose for the forgiveness of sin. Faith, however, is more than just mere belief. Faith is a committed trust, where, because of who Jesus is, we choose to no longer live for ourselves but now live for Jesus. The reverse side of the coin is repentance. Repentance is the act of turning from sin, both sins committed and the state of sin that we find ourselves in. Conversion is what Jesus is speaking about when he proclaims, "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

It is when we begin to discuss regeneration and its relationship to conversion that people often disagree. Regeneration is an act of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of a person, imparting new, spiritual life. This is what Jesus speaks of in John 3:1–15 when he says that we "must be born again." Paul discusses regeneration in 2 Corinthians 5:17, writing, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed; behold, the new has come." Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God has made us a brand new creation.

Think back for a moment. What was your response to Jesus when he saved you?

The issue with the relationship between conversion and regeneration is determining which one comes first. Scripture makes it clear that only God saves (Titus 3:5); however, it also states that salvation only comes through faith and repentance (John 3:16; Acts 2:38). The best way to understand this relationship is to see the order both chronologically and logically. Chronologically speaking, it seems that conversion and regeneration happen simultaneously. However, logically, it seems that conversion should come prior to regeneration. While God initiates, he still calls us to respond to his gospel.

Finally, we come to three very important aspects of salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Upon regeneration, the Bible says that we are justified, or made right with God. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul writes, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Justification does not mean that we are made holy or righteous (i.e., actually clean from sin). Rather, justification means that because of Jesus’s work on the cross and resurrection, God declares us righteous or not guilty of sin. Therefore, while we are not actually righteous, because of Jesus we are seen as righteous before God.

While justification does not actually make us holy or righteous, sanctification does. Unlike justification, that happens at the moment of salvation, sanctification is a lifelong process. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we actually become more like Jesus, removing sin from our lives. While you and I will never reach perfection in this life, the Bible does promise that at the end of our lives, when we meet Jesus face-to-face, we will experience glorification. In glorification, we are completely and finally redeemed. We are

conformed to the image of Christ and sin no longer enslaves or affects us. What a glorious day to look forward to!

All of that might seem like an enormous amount of confusing information. Hopefully it does help explain how you've been changed by Jesus. Remember this: God has saved you! Because he has changed you, you are his!

NOTES

Record any thoughts and questions you have.



**WHAT
SHOULD I
DO NEXT?**

GET BAPTIZED

The most important thing you can do next is get baptized. Vintage Church holds that baptism is a symbolic practice of the church in which [new] believers in Jesus are immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as public obedience to Jesus Christ and as an outward symbol of the believers' forgiveness of sin and new life in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever been baptized before? Maybe you were baptized as an infant or you thought you were saved and so you got baptized.

Since Jesus has changed you, why do you think it is important now to be baptized?

Baptism is an important act in the New Testament. The story of Jesus begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus's cousin. Prior to Jesus beginning his earthly ministry, John the Baptist was in the wilderness by the Jordan River, preaching that the Kingdom of God was coming and that in preparation for this coming Kingdom, people should be baptized as a sign of repentance.

Interestingly enough, Jesus began his ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist. While he did not need to be baptized, Jesus did so “to fulfill all righteousness” or to serve as an example for his followers (Matthew 3:15). At the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commands his disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Baptism is also important throughout the book of Acts as well as in the Apostle Paul’s letters. In Acts, Peter declares that those who come to faith in Jesus and repent of their sin should be baptized (Acts 2:38). In his letter to the Roman church, Paul writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3–4). Needless to say, baptism is a very important response in the New Testament.

So, why should you be baptized? Most importantly, you should be baptized because Jesus commands it. Those who are changed by Jesus should publicly display their salvation to the world through the physical act of baptism. When you are baptized, you are being obedient to Jesus and proclaiming to the world that you belong to Jesus.

Who should be baptized? The Bible makes it clear that only Christians, those who confess Jesus, should be baptized. The Bible never mentions the baptism of infants or adults who have never trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Instead, baptism is for those who have trusted Jesus and repented of their sin. Baptism, a physical act, should only occur when regeneration, a spiritual act, has occurred.

How and where should baptism occur? The actual word, baptize, means immerse. Also, whenever the Bible references someone being baptized, it notes that the person “went down into the water” and “came up out of the water,” language which certainly points to immersion (Matthew 3:16; Acts 18:38–39).

For the most part, when the Bible discusses where baptism takes place it is obviously in water but also surrounded by other believers. Therefore, while you do not need to be baptized in a church building, you should be baptized by immersion surrounded by other Christians.

For more information about baptism or to contact Vintage Church about getting baptized visit vcnola.com/trustinjesus.

ATTEND A VINTAGE CHURCH CONNECT TRACK

While this next step is not stated in Scripture, it is an important step in connecting with the local church. While Vintage Church is just one church among many in the greater New Orleans area, we hope you will connect with Vintage Church. One thing is certain: there is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. When Jesus saves you, he not only connects you with himself, he also connects you with his body—the church. The church is not a building or a place but rather a people. And so, when Jesus saves you, he connects you with a body of other believers to grow with as well as be on mission with.

Attending the Vintage Church Connect Track is an opportunity to learn more about what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus and also about Vintage Church. This track is divided into four weeks with each week covering a different topic: Follow, Discover, Join, and Partner. In these different classes, we talk about what it means to follow Jesus, discover your spiritual gifts and how to serve the church, joining community and a vGroup, and then covenanting with Vintage Church to become a Vintage Partner.

You can learn more about connecting with Vintage Church at vcnola.com/connectwithus.

JOIN A vGROUP

Again, it is important that you connect with a local church. For many people, that simply means coming to a church worship gathering on a Sunday. However, the Bible paints a much different picture of the church. While worshipping with one another every Sunday is important and vital, connecting and building close, lasting relationships with other Christians is a must. This is simply impossible to do in a room with over 100 other people. The early church recognized this as well. In the book of Acts, we see the early church gathering in two different places. First, the church gathered at the Temple for a time of corporate worship (Acts 5:12). This is where the early church would sing together and read the Bible together.

Similarly, the early church gathered in homes together (Acts 2:42–47). There they would eat meals together, pray, study Scripture, and care for one another. More importantly, these were smaller groups of people, and so, they were able to get to know one another more intimately and care for one another more specifically.

Despite 2000 years of separation between us and the church in the book of Acts, Vintage Church believes community is still important. The primary way we try to facilitate community is through vGroups. A vGroup is a small group of 10–20 people who meet regularly throughout the city for transformation, connection, and multiplication.

In just recently coming to faith in Jesus, you cannot do life as a believer alone. In fact, the Christian life was not intended to be lived in isolation. Don't wait to connect with other believers in Vintage Church and throughout New Orleans. Join a vGroup today.

Have you ever been a part of Christian community before? What was it like? If you haven't, what are you hoping to experience in Christian community?

You can find more information about Vintage Church vGroups, including a list of groups at vcnola.com/joinagroup.

BECOME A VINTAGE PARTNER

Connecting with a local church is important but even more so important is committing to a local church. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, he says, "for the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). When we use the word member or membership, the idea of joining a club with rights and privileges immediately comes to mind. However, Paul did not use "member" in the same way. He used member to refer to a body organ, and to teach that just as the body has many members so does the church. Therefore as a new believer in Jesus, it is not just important that you connect with a local church; it is important you commit to a local church.

In seeking to help our culture redefine what membership means, Vintage Church does not use the term membership but rather partnership. To be a Vintage Partner you must be a Christian as well as

make a commitment to Vintage Church. This commitment includes several elements, including living as a Christian, remaining connected to a vGroup, serving on one of our volunteer teams, faithfully attending Sunday worship gatherings, and financially giving to the mission of Vintage Church. These commitments are both important to the Christian who partners with the church as well as Vintage Church. Together we can be a part of an incredible movement of God in New Orleans.

In order to become a Vintage Partner, you must attend at least step four of the Connect Track. After attending step four of the Connect Track, you can become a Vintage Partner by completing the Vintage Partner covenant, which you can find at vcnola.com/becomeapartner. If you would prefer to complete a hard copy of the covenant, return that covenant to one of the Vintage Pastors.

NOTES

Record any thoughts and questions you have.



**HOW CAN I
GROW IN
MY FAITH?**

Like anything, the Christian faith is something that we need to grow in. None of us are born perfectly. Everything we do takes time and practice. From taking our first steps to learning to drive, practice helps us grow. The Christian faith is no different. In becoming a Christian, there are new things to learn about God, ourselves, and our world. At the same time, not only should our knowledge change, but also our actions should change. Because we now follow Jesus, how we live should reflect what we believe. In fact, our goal should be to follow Jesus's example and become more like him.

On top of that, the Christian faith is not just about what we know or how we act but about whose we are. The Christian faith is about a relationship with the God of the universe. Therefore, we do certain things to cultivate that relationship. Think about a relationship that you have or have had with a significant other. That relationship doesn't just happen naturally. Instead, there are things you do to cultivate that relationship. For instance, you probably go on dates with your significant other, do activities together that develop your relationship, and have intentional conversations together.

Enter the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines are both personal and corporate disciplines designed to promote spiritual growth. Throughout the Bible and church history, Christians have been practicing all different types of spiritual disciplines.

As you begin your Christian life, two disciplines stand out above the rest:

READ THE BIBLE

The Apostle Paul describes the Bible as “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Paul tells us two primary things about the Bible. First, it is inspired by God. While men throughout the centuries have penned the words of the Bible, they were inspired by God to write these words. Therefore when you read the Bible, you are not just reading another book; You are reading God's book.

Second, because the Bible is composed of God's message, it is profitable to read and study. When we read and study the Bible, we learn more about God, ourselves, and how we should live our lives. When we read the Bible, we also hear from God. It's one way God communicates with us.

So, as a new believer, it is important that you begin to read the Bible. In this "I've been CHANGED" gift box you were given a 90-day Bible reading plan. In ninety days, this plan will give you an overview of the entire Bible. This is a great place to start! Don't be overwhelmed or feel guilty if you fall behind or have a hard time understanding what you read. Simply stay faithful to read the Bible, and if it takes you a while to understand what you're reading that's fine. The more and more you read, the more the Bible will become easier to read and the more you will grow in your understanding of God.

Another great Bible reading plan is the F260 plan and the HEAR Method created by Pastor Robby Gallaty of Long Hollow Baptist Church. F260 is a tool designed to help you consistently read and meditate on Scripture. With F260, you can read through all 66 books of the Bible in one year, while still having the flexibility of reading 5 days per week. Along with this Bible-reading plan, we are also committing to journal through our Bible reading utilizing Pastor Robby Gallaty's HEAR journal. HEAR stands for Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond. To learn more, visit vcnola.com/f260.

Have you ever read the Bible before? If so, what was your experience?

Now that you have a relationship with Jesus, how do you think reading the Bible might change for you?

PRAY TO GOD

Prayer is the other important spiritual discipline. Throughout Scripture, prayer is an important aspect of the Christian life. In fact, Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer and how to pray (Matthew 6:5–15). Paul tells the church at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Often Jesus himself would get away by himself to pray (Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:15–16; 6:12). Also, prior to Jesus’s arrest and death, he spent time in prayer (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46).

Like reading the Bible, prayer can be very intimidating, but remember what prayer is. Simply put, prayer is talking to God. There are no magic formulas or special ways to pray. Simply talk to God. At Vintage Church, we encourage two things. First, use Scripture to pray. One of the best prayer books is the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. All of these psalms were written as

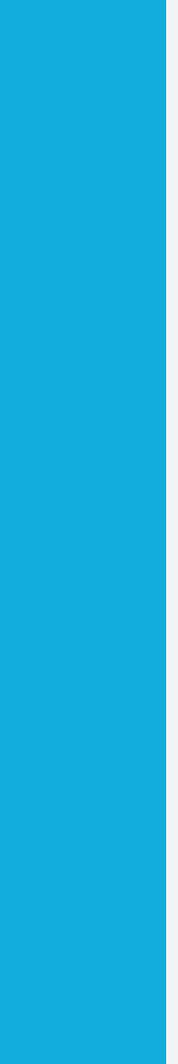
prayers to God, and so, it is natural for us as Christians today to pray them back to God. Second, when you prepare to pray, consider praying through four things:

- **Praise:** Praise God for who he is and what he has done in your life.
- **Confession:** Confess your sins to God, asking for forgiveness.
- **Intercession:** Pray for others and their needs.
- **Commission:** Ask God to send you out to love others and share the gospel with them.

While there are countless other spiritual disciplines that you could practice, Bible reading and prayer are two great places to begin. Talk to God and hear from him!

NOTES

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**WHO AM
I IN
CHRIST?**

We've already briefly looked at what Jesus has done for us. No doubt, Jesus has changed us. So, the question becomes what is our new identity. Second, if Jesus has changed us, will he continue to change us?

A NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST

First, we are new creations. This is what we looked at earlier when we saw how Jesus said you must be born again and how Paul said we are new creations. Prior to Jesus saving us, the Bible says we were dead in our sins and enemies with God (Ephesians 2:1–3). However, once we are changed, the Bible says we are “in Christ.” To be in Christ means we swear allegiance to him alone and therefore we become identified with Jesus. This is what we meant when we discussed justification earlier. When Jesus saves us, we are still sinners; however, because we are in Christ, God no longer sees our sin but rather sees the righteousness or holiness of Jesus. When we are in Christ we are no longer identified by our sin. Rather, our identity is found in Christ and we then become sons and daughters of God, loved by God despite our sin (Galatians 4:1–7).

For you personally, what does it mean to be a new creation, identified by Jesus and not your sin?

OUR PARTICIPATION IN SANCTIFICATION

While Jesus has saved us and declared us righteous, do we ever become more holy and like Jesus? When you think about salvation, it's helpful to think about it in two ways: (1) as a point and (2) as a process. The point of salvation occurs when you are changed, when you trust Jesus and repent of your sin, when God justifies you. However, the process is as important.

The process of salvation is called sanctification. While the point of salvation is only God's work, the process of salvation is a co-labor between God and you. Also, while you are declared righteous at the point of salvation, during the process of salvation you actually become more holy. What this means is that sanctification is a lifelong process. Most of the time it is an up-and-down journey. In sanctification, our job as Christians is to do two things: (1) pursue God and (2) fight sin. We do this in all sorts of ways. In pursuing God, our two spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer are really important. At the same time, we must fight sin by seeking to remove those sins that we struggle with. You might be saying to yourself, "How in the world am I supposed to do that myself?" The answer to your question is that you're not. Because Jesus has saved you, he has given you the Holy Spirit, and it is because of the Holy Spirit's empowerment that you can pursue God and fight sin.

PERSEVERING TO THE END

As we've talked about the lifelong journey of sanctification, you might have become overwhelmed by the reality that this is a longterm process. Remember this: in your own power, you would never be able to persevere in your new Christian faith. None of us would be able to. But you are not living for Jesus in your own power. You're living for Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's message to the Philippian church is still important for us today: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Despite setbacks, struggles, and doubts, we can persevere in our faith until the day we die. And even when we physically die, it is not the end for us. The Apostle Paul reminds us that we will be with God spiritually (Philippians 1:23) and when Christ returns, we will experience complete and final victory when our physical bodies will be resurrected from the grave to meet our spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35–49). We can persevere not because of ourselves but because God has saved us and promised to see us to the end.

You've been changed! Now let's change the world for Jesus!

NOTES

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THEOLOGY, DOCTRINE, & BELIEFS

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HOW TO CONNECT WITH US



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