March 27, 2022

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I LOVE THAT NEW FLOORING

Romans 6:4

Several years ago we learned that our dishwasher had been leaking. At first I didn’t think that was a big deal, but I was wrong. We had far more extensive water damage than I could ever have imagined. We ended up having to replace our floors. As you know, one of the problems with replacing flooring is where do you stop? We ended up replacing all of our flooring. Though we weren’t happy with having to spend all that money, we were very happy with our new floors. We put in some engineered wood floor and some new carpet. They looked great. The flooring we replaced was 15 years old. New was beautiful. Everything looks so good when it’s new. That’s been a few years now, and our new floors are no longer new. Oh, they’re still in very good shape, but if you look closely you’ll see scratches in places on the wood floor and the carpet is beginning to show signs of wear in places. New is wonderful, but it doesn’t last.

There’s something really exhilarating about getting a new car. It’s shiny and clean and everything works. It has all the latest gadgets, bells and whistles. But 5 years later it’s not new anymore. It has a few dings and scratches. Newer cars have some cool new features that your car doesn’t have, and it’s starting to pick up a few small annoying eccentricities. Yes, new is a great thing.

After you have lived a few years the same thing that happens to new floors, new cars, new anything, has begun to happen to you. You’ve picked up a few knicks and dings and maybe the paint has begun a fade. Your life no longer has that showroom gleam to it. The idea of new might look appealing. What if you could have a new life, a do over, a second chance in which all the damage of the past is erased? I think that would sound pretty good. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul wrote, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new Is here.” What used to be is no more, and something new has come. We learned last week that, by faith, we are free from the penalty sin because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. That freedom has made possible a whole new way of living. Today we are going to spend some time thinking about what this new life is. Romans 6:4 says new life is possible.

WE CAN LEARN ABOUT THE NEW BY THINKING ABOUT THE OLD

Romans 6:4 says, “We were therefore buried with him (Jesus) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” In Christ we have a new life. By definition the new life is not the same as the old. Our new floors are not the same as the old. So how is this new life different? What is it like?

The difference between Paul’s life before Christ and his life after he put his faith in Christ was profound and obvious. He went from being an up and coming Jewish religious leader who was rabidly opposed to anything having to do with Jesus, to a follower of Jesus who avidly proclaimed him to anything that moved. Everything he thought about God and about himself, everything that he lived for, was different in this new life. In Philippians 3:7 he wrote, “Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” The gains are what we go for. We seek things we think are good for ourselves. Paul had gotten a lot of those things. In verse 8 he said he now thought of all of them as garbage, and the word he used really meant doggie poop. He didn’t care about any of it anymore. He was a totally different person.

Allen Langham is a man who had a difficult past but now serves in full time ministry. He says, “as a child, there was violence everywhere I turned.” His mother had been widowed, then married again. But she was abused by that man for 20 years. Then he deserted her when Allen was 8 months old. Full of frustration and anger at the absence of his father Allen constantly got into fights with others. When he was 14 his mother died of a cerebral hemorrhage and something snapped inside him. He left home at 16 and he says he was a ticking time bomb, angry, bitter, lost. He pursued a life of alcohol, gambling and fighting. He began dealing drugs and tried to bully and intimidate his way through life. He ended up in prison. After stabbing some other inmates he landed in a top security prison. He says he hated who he had become. “With my violent outbursts and paranoid behavior, I had pushed away anyone I had ever cared for and put my family through hell.” He hit rock bottom and decided to commit suicide. But he made one final plea. He fell to his knees in his cell he prayed for God to give him some sign of hope. God answered, so began reading the Bible and praying, and he came to faith in Jesus. He said he felt peace like he had never experienced in his life. He is now out of prison and says, “miraculously God has even given me my family back.” God has healed the damage to his sisters, his children and even the father who abandoned him so long ago. He has a ministry that reaches out to young people abandoned by society, serves as a chaplain for several teams and goes to prisons to tell of what Christ has done in his life and of the hope he offers to all. The difference between his old life and his new life is stark, obvious and compelling.

But for many of us, that’s not the case. Some of us came to Christ early in life and didn’t have a dramatic change. Yeah, I was a real thug and a wild partier. I got in one fight that consisted of me retaliating against a kid who shoved me by pushing him to the ground. I was about 8. But the parties, wow. I could eat cake with the best of them. And then Jesus saved me. Yeah, hard to see much difference in the before and after. Others have been followers of Jesus for a long time and have a hard time remembering what they were like before coming to Christ. In those cases it is possible to forget how different life in Christ actually is.

One of the unfortunate realities of new is it wears off. Something is new only for a brief time, then it just becomes routine. We get used to it. It doesn’t seem that dazzling anymore. That can happen with this new life in Christ. It can help us if we think about how this new life is different from the old life. Let’s try a thought experiment. Imagine that you are without this new life in Christ. What would that be like? In Ephesians 2:12 Paul gives us a glimpse of that. He reminded his Gentile readers of what life was like before they came to Christ. “Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

What would it be like to be without God in the world? There are many people who think that is exactly what they want. They see God as a threat to their freedom. They want to live life on their own terms and they see God as fencing them in, decreeing rules that limit them, keep them from doing whatever they want. God is a threat to condemn them because somewhere deep in their soul they somehow know things are not right. God is a big source of guilt.

That kind of thinking has a long history. It with the first human beings. Genesis 3 tells us that Eve bought the tempter’s lie that God was limiting their freedom and that he is one big buzzkill. After the two humans made their disastrous choice, what were they doing? Verse 8 says they heard the sound of God coming into the garden, “and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” They wanted to get away from God. The last thing they wanted was to see him because they felt guilty. There are a lot of people hiding from God among the trees.

But hiding from God, being separated from him, turned out to be disastrous. The result was death at several levels. Romans 11:36 says of God, “From him and through him and for him are all things.” All things, including us, are made for him. That is why we exist. That verse claims that we were made to be connected to God as the most important core part of our existence. Augustine, the great 4th century North African theologian and philosopher, wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Either Paul’s and Augustine’s statements are true or they are not. If they are true, then God is not a cosmic killjoy, the source of guilt and the one who wants to limit our freedom so he can limit our joy. Quite the opposite, he is what we are all about. He is the reason we exist. He is what we are made for. Until we know him we will be truly lost. We will not know who we are or why we exist. Without God we will always have this sense that something vital is absent in our lives. We will try to fix it with activity, pleasure, fun, accomplishment, material things, but nothing will ever heal it. None of those things can heal death.

Pay attention to people. They look at horoscopes in the newspaper because they sense there is some guidance out there somewhere directing our lives. They say, “Everything happens for a reason” because they have a sense that someone, something is guiding their lives. They say, “I think the universe is trying to tell you something.” When the pressure is on and they have nowhere to turn, when they face a life threatening situation, what do they do? They pray! They don’t even know who they are talking to, but they pray. When some great thing happens in their lives they feel gratitude. They are grateful, but to whom? All of these things are signs of people’s awareness that there is someone out there that they need. They need to be connected to God and without him there is a profound sense of being disconnected and lost.

When you were a kid did you ever get lost? I have only a vague recollection of a very brief time when I was quite young, we were in a store and somehow I got separated from my parents. For a few moments it was a terrible place to be. Fortunately it was very brief as they found me quite quickly. What a relief that was. When we are without God, it is a bit like that. We are lost, alone in a frightening and seemingly empty universe. Who is going to show us the way to go, to take care of us and protect us? We have no one, and it is awful.

Ephesians 2:12 described that condition of being separated from God as being without hope. This takes us to the ultimate reality for every human being. Death awaits us. We work hard not to think about it. It is too depressing to even consider, so most of the time we avoid it. But it cannot be ignored. Every now and then something happens that rubs our noses in it. A friend or loved one dies. Some health scare forces us to consider the possibility of our own demise. At some point you get old enough that stories in the news about people who have died reveal they were your age or younger. What hope do we have in the face of death?

Jack Welch was the CEO of General Electric, a very intelligent, successful and outspoken man. He was interviewed on the *60 Minutes* television show by Dan Rather once. One of the last questions Rather asked him was, “What’s the toughest question you’ve ever been asked?” Welch answered, “Do you think you’ll go to heaven?” When asked how he answered that question Welch said, “It’s a long answer, but if caring about people, if giving it your all, if being a friend counts, despite the fact that I’ve been divorced a couple of times and no one is proud of that. I haven’t done everything right all the time. I think I got a shot. I’m in no hurry to get there and find out any time soon.”

The toughest question is, do you think you’ll go to heaven? A big part of the reason why it is the toughest is because it has so much at stake. It is the biggest question we all will ever face. He said, “I think I got a shot.” Suppose you were about to board an airplane, a Boeing 737 Max 8 just after the second crash of that aircraft type and you asked the pilot, “Are you sure this thing will get us safely to our destination?” How satisfied would you be if he answered, “I think we’ve got a shot.” I don’t want to have a shot at getting there. I want to know this is going to be a safe trip. When it comes to the biggest question we’ll ever face we need more than a shot. We need more than wishful thinking.

Frankly, Mr. Welch, who now knows whether he was right about having a shot because he died 2 years ago, pinned his hopes on a pretty flimsy resume. He figured it came down to 3 things, caring about people, giving it your all and being a friend. What is the basis for thinking those are the deciding factors? Where did he get those ideas? He pretty much manufactured them out of thin air. I think I have a shot because I’m right handed, don’t enjoy the sport of curling, and survived living in Bakersfield for years. Well those are dumb standards that you just made up. True, and Mr. Welch’s standards are ones he just made up too.

He says caring about people and being a friend are 2 crucial factors. He assumes those things are true of him. But he admits that he has been divorced twice. In the most critical, intimate relationship a person can have there were 2 people who would say that he didn’t care enough about them and he wasn’t a friend. I suspect he didn’t grade out all that well on his own standards. His third standard was giving it your all. Vladimir Putin is giving it his all. His plan for the Ukraine invasion has fallen apart, but he’s not giving up. Do you think that gives him “a shot” at heaven? I think the entire world would say it absolutely does not. I think surviving 18 years in Bakersfield is a better standard than that one.

Everybody needs hope, and as Mr. Welch’s example shows, we need something more solid than his thoughts were. Being without hope, a real, concrete hope, will at some point be terrifying. I am the same age my dad was when he died. If my life were an hour glass there would be way more sand in the bottom than in the top. There is distressingly little sand left up there. Without hope I would be desperate to somehow stop it, or to find some way to refill the top with sand, except there is no way to do that. I can’t envision a world with no me in it. The only thing that can help is to have hope beyond this life, hope that is real. But the old life before Christ has no such hope.

Without God and without hope I am going to realize at some point that my life is empty and meaningless. Take God out of the picture and I am just one of almost 8 billion people on the planet. There is nothing unique about me. I am an accident. I’m here for a few decades, then I vanish forever. I’m as meaningful as the morning fog that burns off and it is like it was never there. The universe won’t notice even for a moment that I am gone and won’t care.

Tony Campolo relates that as a college professor he asked his students when in their lives they have ever felt truly alive. When had they felt pulsating with life and with passion. They admitted that they had few, if any such moments. Wouldn’t you hope that if you had a new life that would be different, that your new life would be truly alive? That kind of fullness of life, that kind of passion, ultimately comes from having a life full of meaning. There is a toy robot is a small black box with a switch on the top. You flip the switch, the top opens and an arm comes out and flips the switch to turn it back off. That’s it. The robot just turns itself off. That’s all it does. In a video some kids reviewed it. One little girl said, “This does not bring joy. It’s just annoying. I think its inventor hates people.” Why are we here? If we are just here to exist for a while, consume some resources then disappear forever having done nothing of lasting significance, we’re just like that. That won’t bring us joy, it’s just annoying. To be fully alive we have to have a real point to our lives.

Why do people donate large sums of money to have buildings at colleges named after them or new wings of hospitals? They are trying to do something that will establish the fact that their life meant something. But what good is it going to do you if your name is on a building somewhere when you are dead? Is that going to fill you with satisfaction? No, you’re dead, you won’t know anything about it. And frankly, not too many years down the road no one will care about your name on a building. They won’t know who you are and they won’t care.

When my son was in high school his last 2 years he helped form and then played on a school hockey team. He got me to coach that team. It was a fun and exciting experience. The team was much better than anyone expected them to be. They won league championships both years in convincing fashion. I remember the intensity of the playoff games and how it seemed like such a big deal. The kids were totally into it, as was their coach. When they won the championships they got their team name put on a permanent trophy. They had their picture in the newspaper with the trophy. They also got a trophy for the school. It was quite an accomplishment. What do you think it means to them today? Almost nothing. Yes, but they left their mark at the school. Not so much. A few years later when they were cleaning out some buildings at the school a friend found their trophies. They were being thrown out. The friend gave them to me and they sat in our garage for years. Then we threw them out. And now their school doesn’t even have a hockey team! In order for our lives to have real meaning, they have to have some meaning that will last for more than a few years. We need meaning that will actually last forever, but such a thing doesn’t exist without God.

How do we know what we should really value in life? How do we know what really matters? How do we know what is right and wrong, what is good and evil? In that old life, we don’t know any of that. This has some big implications for us individually and as a society. How do we know what is right or wrong? Without God, it becomes just whatever I happen to think. Morality becomes a question of what the majority of people think is right or wrong. There are no absolutes, no standard of morality that exists outside the opinions of humans.

The problem with this is, what if the majority of people think it is right to oppress a minority group? What if the majority think it is fine to try to exterminate an entire ethnic group as happened in Nazi Germany? Or what if the majority believed it was fine to enslave people from an ethnic group, such as happened here in our country? The answer to that will likely be something like, “Well, some things are just obviously wrong and not up to majority opinion.” But you can’t say that, because that means there are absolutes, there is some standard of right and wrong that exists apart from human opinion.

Human society will only be just, and we as individuals will only do what is truly right when we acknowledge that there is some standard of morality that exists. We all know some things are just wrong and some are truly right and good. How do we know what those are? When we know God we learn that, for he tells us. His moral judgments are not subject to our opinions. This is crucial for us as individuals because we have an infinite capacity for convincing ourselves whatever we want to do is right. Only God’s truth can stop that runaway train.

THE NEW LIFE REVERSES THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE OLD

In John 17:3 Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” As we know, eternal life obviously is desirable for its duration, but it’s more than that. Eternal life is the kind of life that God intended for humans. It involves not just the quantity of life, but the quality as well. Jesus said that having life as we long for it consists of knowing God. This new life we have is a life in which we know God.

We know God is very real. We know he is good. We know he is wise and sovereign and just. We know he loves us more powerfully than we will ever comprehend. We know he cares about us individually and he knows us thoroughly. We know he is a God of boundless grace and sacrificial love.

In his book, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer related an incident in which he was talking with a friend. This friend was a scholar whose chances at advancement in his academic career had been torpedoed when he clashed with some important people because he would not compromise on the gospel of grace. At one point in response to something Packer said to him this man made a passing comment. He said, “It doesn’t matter, for I’ve known God, and they haven’t.” Packer said that comment stuck with him because not many of us would “say that in the light of the knowledge of God which we have come to enjoy past disappointments and present heartbreaks…*don’t matter*.”

I have been hurt by brothers in Christ, friends of mine, who stabbed me in the back. That was painful. But I know God. Because I know God, I know that he is sovereign. He ruled even in that situation. Whatever those people did and whatever their motives, they could not have done what they did unless God allowed it. Knowing God helps me be at peace with it. I also know that God is good, which means I could trust that God had a good plan in allowing that to happen. I can see now much good has happened for me as a result of what God allowed. Furthermore, it is clear to me that if those men had known God as I know him, they would not have done what they did. I’m not saying that aren’t believers and they don’t know God at all. But it is clear they don’t know him the same way I do or they would have made different choices. I would never have wanted to trade positions with those guys. I’d rather know God as I do. With Packer’s friend I have to say, “I have known God, and to some extent, they haven’t, so it doesn’t matter.”

Having this new life in Christ means having a life in which we have been connected to God after being separated from him. We know that he is with us, working in our hearts and in our circumstances. We know that he is with us at all times to encourage us, strengthen us, guide us and comfort us. There is never a moment in our lives when he is not with us and involved in what is happening. Because we know God that empty place that people keep trying to fill with all sorts of things that inevitably fail miserably, is full. We can have peace in our hearts because we have what we were created for, which is to be connected rightly to God.

In this new life, we are forgiven and accepted by God, loved by him. That means there are a couple of dynamic and powerful changes. The first is we are relieved of guilt. Actor Viggo Mortenson was interviewed in *The Economist*. In the interview he talked about his father, who has dementia. His dad kept telling his caretakers that he forgot to close the pig pen. This seemed to bother him, but they wrote it off as nonsense due to his mental confusion. He didn’t have a pig pen. But then, somehow, they learned the story. Apparently there was a time when he was a boy in which food was scarce for his family. At that time, one day he left the gate to the pig pen open. The pigs got out and destroyed the family garden where they grew their own food. This led to some real hardship for his family. He had never admitted that he was responsible. But his guilt had never gone away. He buried it deep, but it was always there. Now, as an elderly man, that guilt is coming out.

That story tells us something about us. Maybe we didn’t leave the gate to the pig pen open when we were young, but all of us have regrets. We all have failed to be what we know we should be. Research has shown that every one of us carries around a load of guilt. But in this new life, Christ has taken that guilt on himself. The guilt of everything we ever have done or ever will do is taken care of. We cannot undo things in the past, but God says it is all forgiven. He loves us no matter how we may have failed or how we fail in the future. That is an enormous relief. We can be at peace every day because we are forgiven and loved.

We have seen previously that being accepted and loved by God, being given his stamp of approval, is the bedrock foundation of our mental and spiritual health. We don’t have to prove anything or defend anything. We don’t have to try to establish we have value or worth. We can be at peace about that as well.

This new life is bursting with meaning. Today we are a handful of people. We sing a few songs, listen to this nimrod harangue us for too long, chat with each other, then go on our way. The world doesn’t notice us, and if it did it would laugh at us. We are so small and insignificant it is ludicrous. But the world has it wrong. We know that everything we do here matters. Our praise to God is eternal. Our submitting to him reverberates through the spiritual realm. Your smile to a brother or sister, your hugs for them, your words of care and encouragement, serve a huge purpose. That’s true every moment of our lives because we are honoring God, fulfilling the highest purpose a human can have. This new life means something enormous, so that we can be truly alive in every small moment of our lives.

Of course a huge benefit of this new life is that we have hope. We have the hope of eternal life. Because Jesus Christ conquered death and promises that we will live with him, we know that the end of our life in this world is not the end of us. We shall live with him forever. There is nothing that can compare with this hope. It is more valuable than anything else we could ever have.

Are you surprised to hear that I adore Laurie with all my heart? I know you’re not. I’ve known her for almost 44 years, and have been married to her for 42 and a half years. She has been the most constant, powerful and joyful influence in my life over those years. She has been a fountain of encouragement, wisdom, love, joy, fun, excitement and laughter continually. Not long ago we went to Costco one day. As we approached the entrance Laurie got out her membership card, showed it to one employee who was standing on one side, then thinking he wasn’t there for that she showed it to the guy on the other side. She started laughing and said, “I guess I’ll just show my card to everybody.” Her laughter is infectious. Both of the employees started laughing, I started laughing. It was a classic Laurie moment. It was an utterly routine, mundane thing, but she brought laughter and joy to every person that was there. I don’t know how she does it. If I did the exact same thing those guys would have said, “Whatever dude. We saw your card. You can move along.” She does things like that all the time. I don’t know of anyone who has a wife, a companion, a lover like her. I have had more joy, more to be thankful for because of her than anyone I know. But I can also tell you that no matter how many years we will have together, it won’t be enough. The thought of being separated from her fills me with sadness. Except for one thing. We will not be gone forever. We will see each other, know each other and rejoice in each other in God’s kingdom, forever. That hope means everything. That’s one of the amazing things we have in this new life.

In this new life we have God’s truth and his guidance. That means we can know what is right and wrong. We can know what matters in life. We can live a life that is bursting with meaning in everything we do, because all of it counts for eternity as we seek to glorify God in every moment, every relationship, every task we undertake. In this life, we are different. We have the Spirit of Christ in us. He changes how we see the world. He guides us to be different people and strengthens us so we can live by faith.

APPLICATION

REMEMBER THAT IN CHRIST YOU HAVE A NEW LIFE

I used to tell people at my former place of employment that I was something of a Luddite. The truth is, I’ve never been a Luddite. When personal computers were in their infancy I was the first pastor in my denomination at the time to get one and use it. They actually had me demonstrate it for the other pastors in the area.

Nevertheless, I’m not a millennial. I’m not as naturally adept at using some of the latest technological advances as they seem to be. I still am not as good at using a smart phone as they are. Laurie is better at it than I am. I have had several occasions where I’ve had to send a document of some sort to someone. I wonder how I’m going to do that. Then they say, “Just take a picture of it with your phone and text it or email it.” Oh, yeah. I forget I can do that. I just don’t think of it. It’s so easy.

I think we get like that with our new life. We forget what an amazing thing it is. “Oh, yeah. I forgot. I have a new life with all these features that are astounding.” It is important for us to remember what we have.

REJOICE AND GIVE THANKS FOR THIS NEW LIFE

Even now, several years after we replaced our flooring, even though it is now not brand new, Laurie will say, “I love our wood floor. I just love how it looks.” She’s rejoicing in it even though we’ve had it for a while. She never takes it for granted. That’s kind of like what we should do with our new life in Christ. We should never take it for granted. We should remind ourselves of what a huge blessing it is and we should thank God that he has given it to us at enormous cost to himself.

REFUSE TO GO BACK TO THE OLD LIFE

When Laurie and I first met I had an Opel Kadet as my car. Yeah, I know, a what? Hey, this was a German made car. But it was not like a BMW or Mercedes. It was at the other end of the spectrum. It wasn’t as bad as a Yugo, one of the worst cars ever made, or the pitiful AMC Gremlin, but it was more in that direction. It had a heater, that was it. No radio, no AC, hand crank windows. By that time it had developed some unfortunate mechanical quirks. You can ask Laurie to verify this, but at one point when the engine was running it had a faint odor like fried chicken. I never found out what that was. Suppose someone gave us a brand new top of the line Tesla, a model S with all wheel drive, top speed of 200 mph, a range of 353 miles, that sells for a cool $130,000. Who would want that these days as gas will soon be selling for $100 a gallon? How much chance is there that I would say, “Thanks, this is nice, but I really miss my old Opel”? Zero.

So it is with our old life without Christ. It was terrible. That was why we put our faith in Christ. So why would we even be the least bit interested in going back to it. Let’s refuse to do that. As Paul says, let’s not give any part of our body or our life to the old way as tools of wrong.