# Love - God Gives Life

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[0:00] And we'll be looking at that in just a minute. Well, let's pray.

Some things are habit, aren't they, when we pray before we listen to God's Word. But the reason we do is because we come as needy people. It's an expression of our dependence on God that we need His help and the help of His Holy Spirit.
So let's pray. Father God, just as you spoke at the beginning of time and brought this world into existence, so we ask that you would now speak to us through your Word and bring life to us.
That this morning would be a time where we know what it is to have a new heart.
What it is to be shaped and molded to be more like you. So, Father, change us and be at work amongst us today.
[1:32] We ask this for your glory and for our good. Amen. Well, it was probably the lowest point in my life.

In a crazy moment that lasted no more than five seconds, I said something and I did something that left my life in a mess.
I was let go of my job. I had no income. And I hadn't anywhere to stay. I longed for a new beginning.
For those five seconds just to be wiped out. And to start all over again. Well, I think we've all been there to some degree or another.
We look back through our past. The decisions that we've made. The choices that we've made. The words that we've said. And we long for a new beginning.
[2:40] Well, the story of the Bible introduces us to a God who specializes in new beginnings.
Remember how it all started.

In love. God began and he created a beautiful world. God began and he created a beautiful world.
But that world turned into chaos and disorder as Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, rebelled against God.
And people had become so evil and so wicked that God sent a flood and it wiped out the entire population of the world. Except in love.
God kept Noah and his family safe. And so they start again. But that new beginning didn't last very long.
Noah and his family and their children ignored God. And well, they ended up in the same mess as before. But in love, God intervened and he started again with the man called Abraham.
[3:45] And God said to Abraham that he would make him into a great nation. And he would bring great blessing to the world. But this new beginning didn't last.

Abraham's family were a mess. Lying, stealing, cheating. And so the disorder started all over again.
And this great family ends up in slavery in Egypt.
Broken and ruined. But yet again, in love, God reaches down and he rescues them. And he gives them a fresh start.
God provides them with a new leader, Moses, and promises to be their God. But their new beginning was short-lived.
The seeds of rebellion were still there. God was quickly forgotten and pushed out. And everyone did as they pleased. But in love, God raised up a king.
[4:46] A king after his own heart. King David, who came to restore order and to bring blessing.
And so they begin again.

But this new beginning turned into despair. With every new generation, the kings get progressively worse.
Leading the people far away from God. They hit an all-time low. And eventually, under God's judgment, they are taken away into exile by the nation of Babylon.

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Now, this isn't just history. This is a story of my life and your life. This is the pattern of the human race.
God bringing new beginnings. But what's going to stop this cycle of rebellion and disorder and judgment? What's going to break this ongoing troubled world?
[5:49] Well, what's needed is a new heart. A new kind of life in people. Have a look at Ezekiel chapter 18.

You see, it's at this low point in their lives. They've been taken away into exile, into Babylon. And it's during this time in exile that God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel to the people.
And God tells them, this is what you need to do. Verse 30 of chapter 18. Verse 30.
Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent. Turn away from all your offenses.
That sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed. And get a new heart.
[6:51] And a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Repent and live. You see, at the heart of this cycle of rebellion and disorder is the human heart.
So God tells the people, verse 31, you need to get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. In other words, you need a new life.
But history has proved we can't change our heart. We can't change our life even if we wanted to. The history is there before us to show us that we can't change ourselves.
Like Israel of the past, we continue to fall into a cycle of rebellion and disorder. So God changes things.
[7:52] He makes another promise. Rather than say, get yourself a new heart. God promises to give a new heart.

Look at Ezekiel chapter 36. Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 25. We need to move on a bit. Chapter 36. Look what he says. Here's the promise. Ezekiel 36, verse 25.
I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
[9:03] You see, this is nothing less than a brand new life, a fresh start, a new beginning. This is what the people need. A person who ends up on the operating theatre and receives a heart transplant receives a new life.

So what we need is not more rules or not another chance or not another opportunity or another rebuke or another sermon telling us that we have to wake up and do better and live better.
What we need is a new heart. A new life. And that's what Jesus came to do.
To bring us this new life that we all need. The new beginning. And in love, God breaks into the world through his son Jesus to give the promise of a new life.
Look at how the New Testament authors put it. for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
[10:23] But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared he saved us so that we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.
This is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him. You see the promise that God gave all those hundreds of years ago that God would bring new life well he has done that through the sending of his son the Lord Jesus Christ the God man who's come to break the cycle of rebellion and disorder and to give new life so that people can live God's way.
So what is this new life? What does it look like? And how do we get it? Well first God offers new life.
Let's have a look at John's Gospel chapter 3. We're going to stay here for a while. John's Gospel chapter 3. Because here we have an encounter with a man called Nicodemus and here we see how he gains how he's offered this life and how he receives this life.
[12:05] Let's read John's Gospel chapter 3 and verse 1. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus.

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A Pharisee was a particular sect religious group had very very legalistic. One of these Pharisees named Nicodemus a member of the Jewish ruling council which was called the Sanhedrin which was like a special council or government a little bit like our dawn.
So here is a man who was religiously and politically right up there with the elite. And he comes to Jesus verse 2 at night and he said Rabbi we know you are a teacher who has come from God for no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.
So it's as if he's coming to Jesus with a sense of I know something of who you are and what you've done. It's like because I know this and I recognise it surely I qualify to have life with you.
Verse 3 In reply Jesus declared I tell you the truth no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.
[13:32] You see Nicodemus wants to experience the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kind of life that we saw pictured right at the very beginning in Genesis in the Garden of Eden.

It's a life of peace and justice a world without sickness and suffering a life marked by love and kindness where there is the absence of death and all evil it is a life lived in relationship with God where there's no guilt and no shame is openness before God.
No fear of death no fear of judgement it is a good and perfect life for all of eternity and that's the kind of life that Jesus has come to offer to the world.
That's the new beginning that Jesus came to establish. Look at verse 2 again he says to Jesus we know you're a teacher who's come from God for no one could perform the miraculous signs you were doing if God were not with him.
So as Jesus went about his ministry and he performed all these different miracles healing the sick controlling nature defeating satanic forces raising the dead Jesus was giving us a glimpse of what life in his kingdom looked like and what the life he had come to bring was all about.
[14:59] Now says Jesus in verse 3 if you want to see this kingdom if you want to enter the kingdom yourself if you want this true life then you must be born again.

Nicodemus you need to start your life afresh. In fact you need a new life if you are to live my way and be part of my kingdom.
Now if that is true it leaves us in a predicament moment. Because if we need new life that means our present life is hopelessly dead.
Not physically dead but spiritually dead. We can still eat and drink and walk and talk and go about our life and go to work every single day but spiritually it's saying there's no life within us.
Spiritually speaking we're no different to a decaying body in a graveyard. And that's how Jesus sees the world before him. The people before him.
[16:13] We are people he says without life. Have a look at chapter 5 verse 21. John chapter 5 verse 21. For just as the father raises the dead and gives them life even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

You cannot give life to something unless it is dead. And he's saying that's what we're like. Look at verse 25. I tell you the truth the time is coming it has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live.
For as the father has life in himself so he has granted the son to have life in himself. You see according to Jesus the population of the world throughout history has been born spiritually dead.
And dead people cannot give themselves life. A man who suffered a heart attack and lies on the road dead can't give himself CPR and resuscitate himself.
in the same way we are not in a position to give ourselves life. We are spiritually dead. It doesn't matter if we go on a life coaching course.
[17:44] It doesn't matter if we go on some kind of retreat. We cannot make ourselves alive. We cannot give ourselves the new beginning and the fresh start that we need.

In fact, if we go back to chapter 3, to be spiritually dead is a really serious condition to be in. Look at the way the end of chapter 3 verse 36 puts it.
So he's talking about giving life to someone, to Nicodemus, and here's how he finishes this whole section, verse 36. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.
You see, to be spiritually dead is to be in a serious condition of where we are under God's fair and just judgment separated from him.

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So we desperately need to be made alive. And if we are to experience new life from God, then he must be the one who is to give us that life.
[19:07] So he offers new life, second, God gives new life. Let's read chapter three, verse three again. God gives new life.

In reply, Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Well, how can a man be born when he is old?
Nicodemus asked. Don't be so silly. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born. People can't be born again.
It's impossible. You can't start life afresh. Well, yes, he is right in some sense.
A physical rebirth is impossible. But a spiritual rebirth is possible. In fact, the new life that God has come to give is like being born again.
[20:09] It's like being physically born again and starting your life from scratch. It's a new beginning. God has come to give us the fresh start that we all need.

And he goes on to explain that this new life is seen in three ways. First, we are washed by God.
Look at verse 5. Jesus answered, I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit.
Well, what does that mean? To be born of water and the spirit? Well, do you remember the promise that we looked at that God had made through the prophet Ezekiel?
Have a look back in Ezekiel 36. Keep your finger in John 3 and go back to Ezekiel chapter 36. verse 25.
[21:20] Jesus says you must be born of water and the spirit. Now, look at what God had promised in Ezekiel. Verse 25. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. You see, our sin, this rebellion, is like a deeply ingrained dirt on our body that we can't remove no matter how much we scrub and wash by our promises to clean up our life and never to do it again.
And it's this rebellion, it's this sin in our lives that makes us unclean and unacceptable before God.
It's what separates us from the life of God.
It's what leaves us under the wrath and the judgment of God. But God in His love, through His Son Jesus, washes us so that we are clean.
He is the one who cleans us with clean water. Through His death on the cross, He cleans us deep inside so the uncleanness is completely removed.
[22:42] It means my sin is forgiven. It means my guilt and my shame is removed. It's washed away. In fact, the cleaning work of God is so deep in our lives that when He cleans us, we can never, never, ever, ever become unclean again in God's sight.

His cleaning is so deep that we can never, ever become unclean in His sight again. Look what it says at the end of verse 25.
He says, I will cleanse you from all your impurities. something beautiful. But we need more than the cleansing of the old.
We need a creation of the new. So He cleans up the old and He creates something new.
He gives us a new heart. Jesus said to Nicodemus, you need to be born of the water and the spirit.
So look what it says in verse 26 of Ezekiel 36.
[24:04] God says, I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Do you see what's going on there? It's like a surgery that's taking place. The old, stony, stubborn heart will be cut out and removed and in its place a new heart, a fleshy one, a heart that is soft and living and responsive is going to be put in its place.
And when we receive this new heart from God, it means we have a new way to live. Verse 27. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
It's like the Holy Spirit comes along, the chief surgeon, and he takes our soft new heart that God has placed within us and the Holy Spirit takes that heart and he begins to shape it and to mould it according to his shape so that we begin to take on God's character so that we begin to look like him.
John Piper, who's one author, put it like this, God replaces our hard, unresponsive heart with a soft heart that treasures Jesus above all things and is being transformed transformed by the presence of the Spirit into the kind of heart that loves to do the will of God.

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[26:00] Do you see how transforming this new life is? It's completely new. new. So what we need is a cleansing of the old, a washing deep down in our lives, a cleansing of the old, but we also need a creation of the new, something different.

You see, without being washed by God, without being given a new heart from God, we will not know and experience life in his kingdom and we will not know what it is to live for him and to follow him and to be able to live his way.
It's the fresh start that God had promised all those years ago that was going to break the cycle of rebellion and disorder. It's the fresh start that the world needs.
So we're washed by God, we're given a new heart by God. But it's all been initiated by God. Go back to John chapter 3.
John chapter 3 and verse 6. You see what Jesus says to Nicodemus in verse 6?
[27:27] Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit. flesh. He's making it so clear that we are incapable of giving ourselves new life.

All that we can do, our only ability within ourselves is to produce more sin and create more rebellion. That is our nature. That's all we bring to the table.
Flesh gives birth to flesh. We cannot make ourselves something other than what we are. all we can do is just make more of the same kind of people that we are.
But God comes to give new life. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit.
Just go back to John chapter 1 and verse 12. John 1 verse 12. See what it says there?
[28:35] Yet to all who received him, to all who received Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.
You see, physically and naturally, a husband and wife can give birth, can produce a child, but spiritual life is not our decision, it's not within our ability, it's not even within our desire, it's a life that has been completely given to us by God.
Spirit gives birth to spirit, it's something outside of us that God does within us, He cleans us up of the old, He intervenes and says, I am going to wash you, and I am going to give you a new heart. He cleans us of the old, and He creates in us something new. So the question is, have you got this new kind of life?
love? Have you by faith received the life that God gives? Have you experienced the washing of God deep down in our life?
[30:04] Have we experienced this new heart from God that transforms us and moves us to want to follow His ways? Jesus. Well, Jesus says there's only one way to tell when we've experienced this new life.

Look at chapter 3 verse 7. There's only one way to know that we've experienced this new life.
Verse 7. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again. the wind blows wherever it pleases.
You hear it sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. You see, it's an illustration here.
It's actually, how do you know if the wind is blowing? Well, sometimes you can hear it as it were as it whistles through the trees.
[31:13] Sometimes you can feel it as it cuts to your skin. But most of all, if you're standing indoors, you see its effects as the leaves fall from the trees and the branches start bending.

You can see the effects of the wind. You don't know where the wind is coming from, what direction. You can't take control of it or move it in this way or that way. but the effects of the wind are clearly visible for all to see.
When we receive life from God by faith, the effects of the Spirit of God at work in our life are undeniable.
if we have been washed, if we have been given a new heart, then it will be crystal clear for all to see. The effects will be known by everybody.
That doesn't mean to say we're perfect. It doesn't mean to say that we'll never ever fall or fail again. But if we have this life from God, it will at the very least mean these two things.
[32:25] And I want to leave us with these two things to dwell on and to think about. Here's the first thing. If we have this life, here's the first undeniable effect.

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Here's the first one. When we sin or get into a pattern of sin, we won't ignore it. We will deal with it ruthlessly.
We will repent and come to God and ask Him to wash us afresh. So there will be a pattern of confession and repentance in our lives.
Rather than hiding things and pushing things away, we deal with it. That is the first obvious sign of this new life from God.
And here's the second undeniable effect. when we see behaviour that is inconsistent with being a Christian, if we see a lifestyle that's not like Christ, then we will come to God and ask the Holy Spirit to come and to shape and mould our hearts afresh so that we begin to look like Christ in our behaviour and we begin to talk his words of truth.
[33:48] truth. So do you see those two undeniable effects if the Spirit of God is blowing and working through our lives? We won't ignore sin, we will deal with it ruthlessly.

And we will come looking for that washing afresh. And the second thing, we will ask the Holy Spirit of God to shape and mould and change our hearts so that we become to look more like him.
This is the new life that God has come to bring. If God did not intervene into our world and into our lives, we would remain dead, hopelessly dead.
But this is a new life that he's given us, a life that we can share with the world so that they too can experience this life changing, transforming work of God.
Let's just take a moment to reflect on that as we pray. Amen. Thank you.

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