



Awaken 365
November 2025
Steve Burston

Life in Christ & Constructing a Well-Founded Life
Life “In Christ”: The New Creation Identity

Life in Christ & Constructing a Well-Founded Life
Life “In Christ”: The New Creation Identity

The Apostle Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” 86 times in his letters. For him, this is not a small idea—it is central to what it means to be a Christian. To understand life “in Christ” is to understand who we truly are now that we belong to Him.



The first creation, the world as it currently exists, is fallen and corrupted. Scripture teaches that history will one day end—that there will be a final moment in time known as the Day of the Lord. On that day, the present heavens and earth will pass away, and God will bring forth a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal home of righteousness (2 Peter 3). For those who belong to Christ, eternity is not floating on clouds; it is life in a renewed creation, free from death, sorrow, and brokenness.

But we do not simply wait for that future. God has already begun His new creation work within us. While the world continues in its brokenness, those who are born again carry a foretaste of the age to come.

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come."

When a person is born again, Christ Himself comes to dwell within them. This is what fundamentally changes everything. Becoming a Christian is not merely adopting moral behaviour or participating in religious practices. It is receiving the Spirit of Christ. Paul says plainly:

"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."
(Romans 8:9)

Humanity divides not into religious and non-religious, but into two groups:

- Those who have the Spirit of God
- Those who do not

To be in Christ means that the old self—the self apart from God—has died, and a new life now emerges from Christ living within us (Galatians 2:20). Christ in us is the source of all transformation, identity, inheritance, and spiritual power. What He has, we now share, because He is united to us.

Paul goes further in 1 Corinthians 6:17:

"Whoever is united with the Lord is one spirit with him."

There are not two separate beings living side by side—you and God—but a profound spiritual union. A helpful illustration is that of a mother and unborn child: distinct persons, yet sharing one life.

A story illustrates this reality. A Jewish rabbi once sought prayer from a Christian woman named Leanne Payne. When he entered her home, he saw Jesus standing behind her. Christ stepped forward and entered him, and the man fell under the power of the Spirit for hours. When he recovered, he said, "I understand now that grace is not a principle—it is a person."



Whether or not we felt anything dramatic when we were saved, the same reality is true of every believer: Christ entered us.

Because Christ lives in us, we have received His authority and His power. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He seated Him far above every power of darkness (Ephesians 1:20–22). And astonishingly, Paul says that God has also seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). This means we live from a position above the power of darkness, not beneath it. We also carry Christ's power, the very power that raised Him from the dead (Ephesians 1:19–20). We were not given a partial Spirit or a junior version of Jesus. From the moment of new birth, we carry the fullness of Christ. However, many Christians live unaware of this reality, like wealthy heirs who never access their inheritance.

2 Peter 1:3 states:

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness."

Everything we need to live like Jesus is already within us, placed in our spirit like spiritual DNA. But the Spirit desires to fill not only our spirit but also our mind, emotions, will, and imagination—transforming our whole person into Christlikeness.

This process requires faith. We must choose to believe what God says is true, even when our past experiences or feelings suggest otherwise. Like Abraham, who believed God's promise despite every physical impossibility, we learn to stand on God's word, speak it, and live from it until it becomes visible reality.

To do this, we actively take hold of our spiritual inheritance:

- Know what God has given you (through Scripture).
- Believe it, even when it contradicts past patterns.
- Speak it and act on it until your life aligns with the truth.

The transformation is gradual, like walking with God day by day. Over the years, as we consistently cooperate with the Spirit, we become increasingly aligned with our true identity in Christ. And when the day comes that we step into eternity, the work God has begun in us will be completed in an instant.

Constructing a Well-Founded Life: Identity, Soul, and Renewal

1. The Foundation of Identity

As we've discussed before, it's important to get the right foundations in our lives—just as it's important to lay the right foundation when building a structure. If the foundation is faulty, the building is in jeopardy. Likewise, if the foundation of our lives is faulty, our identity can be faulty—and we will begin to develop cracks in our soul.



If you're going to construct a healthy life, it begins with what you believe about yourself.

Next term, we'll study Ephesians. It's a captivating book. In the first three chapters, Paul focuses on who we are in Christ. In fact, the phrase "in Christ" or "in Him" is the key expression throughout the book. It appears eleven times in the first chapter and thirty times in total. That phrase describes our relationship with God—our union with Christ—and who we are now in our Father's eyes.

Paul writes that we are chosen in Him.

Read Ephesians 1 and look at who the Father says you are.

The Father chose you in Christ before the foundation of the earth. It wasn't dependent on what you did, or who you are, or what you have.

He chose you in Christ to make you holy and blameless in His sight.

You are adopted into the family of God.

In the Roman Empire, an adopted child had the full privileges of a biological child and was completely released from control of his biological parents.

Adoption implies both belonging and freedom.

In Him, you have been redeemed by His blood, and your sins have been forgiven, because God has lavished His grace upon you.

You are forgiven according to the riches of His grace, not according to the poverty of your life. His grace is greater than your sin—ininitely greater than the poverty of a sin-stained soul.

In Him, you have been called for a purpose of eternal significance.

You have received an inheritance from God, and you are also God's inheritance, His portion.

You have been included in Christ and marked with a seal—the promised Holy Spirit—as a member of His family.

This is who you are in Christ, and this is only the beginning of your identity—the foundation of your well-being.

Paul describes who we are in Christ across three entire chapters, emphasizing that God's love for us is not dependent on our best efforts.

God's love for us is rooted in His grace.

He doesn't love us because of who we are or what we do; He loves us because of who He is and what He has done.

That makes His love—and our foundation—unshakeable.

We are **chosen** in Christ before the foundation of the world.

We are made **holy and blameless** in His sight.

We are **adopted** as sons and daughters of God.



We are **redeemed** and **forgiven** through His blood.
We are **lavished** with grace.
We are **called** according to His purpose.
We have **received an inheritance**.
We are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit.

After three chapters of building this solid foundation, Paul shifts in chapter four and writes:

“As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”
— Ephesians 4:1

Paul calls us to live a life worthy of our identity in God's radical love—to live an integrated life, where our identity shapes our destiny, and who we are determines how we live.

If only we truly understood who we are in Christ—if we believed what God believes about us—it would revolutionize the way we live.

2. **The Soul: Integration of the Whole Person**

To truly understand your identity, you must also understand the difference between your soul and your spirit.

*Your spirit has been made new. You are a new creation in Christ.
You have received a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26).*

Your spirit has been perfected in Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3).

You are adopted (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15), and you are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

Your spirit has been purified, renewed, and transformed.
But your soul—that can still be a bit of a mess.

John Ortberg, in his book *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You*, writes that:

“You are a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God—which means you were not made to be self-sufficient.”

Dallas Willard's *Circles of the Self*

Dallas Willard, whom Ortberg knew well, often taught that “what is running

your life at any given moment is your soul—not your thoughts, not your circumstances, not your feelings, but your soul."

He explained that the soul is what integrates all the parts of the person—mind, will, and body—into a single, living whole.

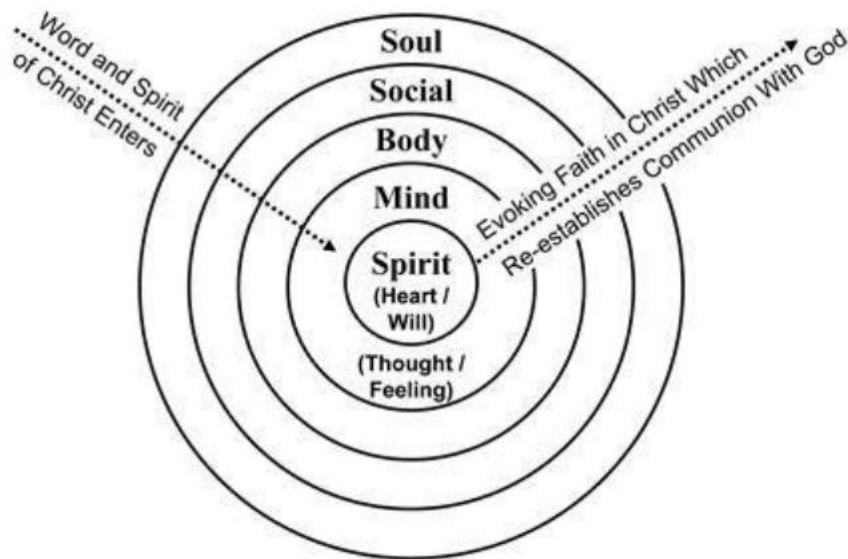
Willard once drew a diagram on a napkin: a series of concentric circles representing the dimensions of the human self.

At the center is the will—the capacity to choose.

Around it is the mind—thoughts and feelings.

Then the body—actions, appetites, and habits.

Surrounding all is the soul, which integrates everything and relates the whole person to God.



The soul seeks harmony and connection.

That's why integrity—being a whole person—is such a soul word.

When the soul integrates the will, mind, and body in alignment with God, you are healthy and whole.

When these parts are in conflict, your soul suffers fragmentation.

A healthy soul lives in harmony with God's intent and is connected in love to both God and others.

An unhealthy soul is fractured, restless, and disintegrated.

Today, we've largely replaced the word soul with self—but they are not the same.

The more we focus on the self, the more we neglect the soul.

The self tries to be independent; the soul knows it is dependent on God.



3. **Renewing the Mind: The Path to Transformation**

The key problem with our identity is that we believe lies about ourselves rather than truth.

This is why we must renew our minds.

The power of a lie lies in our agreement with it.

Whatever we agree with, we empower.

If we agree with truth, the truth will set us free.

But if we agree with lies, they will cast a shadow over our lives.

What you believe about yourself will shape how you live.

It's not enough to simply know the truth; your life must be built upon it.

Truth must be integrated into your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors—into the very structure of your soul.

This never happens accidentally. You must intentionally build your life on who

God says you are.

There are two essential tools for renewing the mind:

1. Truth
2. The Presence of God

You are renewed by holding on to truth, and you are transformed in the presence of God.

In His presence, your true identity is revealed.

Transformation: The Greek Word “Metamorphoō”

The New Testament word for transformation is metamorphoō—from which we get metamorphosis.

It occurs only four times in Scripture: twice at the Transfiguration of Jesus, when He was revealed in glory, and twice referring to our own transformation.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul teaches that we are transformed in the presence of God through the Spirit.

We are not like Moses, who could only temporarily reflect God's glory.

We have constant access to His presence—and that presence is transformational.

That is why you must spend time alone with God—not to seek His hands, but His heart.

In silence, God reaches into the deep basements of your soul, where He heals, convicts, and restores.

He whispers His love to you.

In His presence, you are changed.

4. **Exposing the Lies That Shape Us**

As always, the process of building a healthy foundation of identity begins with self-awareness.

But it can also come through others praying for you—people who discern and speak DNA-type prayers over your life. Through prayer, purity, and consecration, the Spirit often gives pictures and words that shape identity. For me, those images were:

- Oaks of Righteousness—rooted, enduring, unshakable.
- A salmon swimming upstream—persevering against the current.
- A great wave—symbolizing the transformation that came when I was baptised in the Spirit back in Ashington in 2007.

You can never rise above your self-awareness. That's why the first step in growth is to identify the lies that shape you.

The False Self

There is always a false self—a shadow side that hides behind fig leaves like Adam and Eve.

It tries to conceal shame and mistakes.

Its symptoms include defensiveness, pettiness, and compulsion.

When you live from the false self, criticism feels like an attack on your worth. Irritations reveal unhealed places in your heart.

Compulsive behaviors are attempts to fill inner lack.

We grab for things—success, possessions, relationships—to feel enough, but they only cover shame instead of healing it.

Three Core Lies

1. The Performance Lie — “My value depends on what I do.”
2. The People-Pleasing Lie — “My worth depends on who likes me.”
3. The Defensive Lie — “I must protect myself to survive.”

Each of these lies warps the soul's foundation.

Every time you act on a lie, it gains power.

Every time you choose truth, you weaken the lie's hold.

The Performance Lie

This lie says your value depends on your performance.

It's deeply embedded in Western culture and even the church.

We often measure worth by what we achieve, how we behave, and how others respond.

But your value is not determined by your performance.

God doesn't love you more when you succeed or less when you fail.

He loves you because of who He is, not because of what you do.

The People-Pleasing Lie

This lie says your validity depends on whether others approve of you.

Some need everyone's approval. Others only crave it from a few key people.



Either way, it leads to exhaustion.

Even defiance—saying, “I don’t care what people think”—can be another form of people-pleasing, a defensive way of reinforcing a shaky foundation. Notice what thoughts run through your mind when you’re unguarded—they’ll reveal what foundation you’re standing on.

Bringing Lies into the Light

We cannot overcome what we won’t admit, and we cannot heal what remains hidden.

Light is not an intrusion—it’s a gift.

That’s why God invites us to bring our false selves into His light.

There, truth dismantles lies, and grace rebuilds the foundation of our souls.

Conclusion: Becoming Whole

When your foundation is built on truth, when your mind is renewed, and when your soul is integrated under God’s presence, your life becomes whole. Transformation happens as truth and presence work together.

TRANSFORMATION

(Becoming Who You Already Are)

THE WORD OF TRUTH

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

(Reveals who you are) (Reveals who He is)

Renewing the Mind Renewing the Soul

FREEDOM & MATURITY

You were created to live from your true self—rooted in the love of the Father, redeemed by Christ, and sustained by the Spirit.

When your soul, spirit, and mind are aligned with God’s truth and grace, your life will stand firm—whole, healed, and unshakeable.

The Third Core Lie: Defensiveness Control

The third core lie is that the issue of your value depends on whether you are in control.

Some people afflicted with this lie try to control others.

They manipulate, shame, judge, condemn, and sometimes even bully the people around them in an attempt to feel secure or valuable.

Others try to control outcomes.

The classic “Type A” achiever—the driven, in-charge, results-oriented person—believes their worth is tied to their ability to produce results and control the outcomes they desire.

The underlying belief is this:

“If I can control things, I have value. If I can’t, my worth diminishes.”

That’s a lie.



Fear Beneath Control

People who have experienced abuse often struggle deeply with issues of control.

Fear is always lurking underneath the desire to control.

Root fears feed root lies, and those lies, in turn, reinforce the fears.

We must learn to connect the dots between them.

Those who have been abused often lose hope of receiving love, but they settle for control—because at least control offers a sense of safety.

It's as if they tell themselves:

"You may not love me, but you will not hurt me again."

Control becomes a substitute for love, a way of creating a false sense of security.

But control is a false foundation—and it leads to cracks in the soul.

Unless we stand on the true foundation, we cannot have a healthy soul.

Reflection with the Holy Spirit

Take a moment to reflect prayerfully with the Holy Spirit:

- Is control an issue in your life?
- Have people ever said you are controlling?
- How does the lie of control show up in you?
- Do you seek to control people?
- Do you try to control outcomes?
- When you are not in control, do you become fearful, angry, or anxious?

These are symptoms that reveal when we are standing on this faulty foundation.

The Truth That Sets You Free

The good news is that your value is not determined by whether or not you are in control.

Your worth was settled forever on the cross.

On the cross, the Father said to you:

"You are of infinite worth to Me. You are worthy of My Son's blood."

Paul writes:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"

— Romans 8:31–32

If Jesus died for you, nothing can diminish your worth:

not rejection, not enemies, not hatred, not criticism, not abandonment, not abuse, not a spouse who leaves or stops loving you, not failure, not weakness, not circumstances beyond your control.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God.