

I M A G I N E L I F E



An aerial, high-angle photograph of a dense urban cityscape. The image shows a mix of architectural styles, including several tall, modern skyscrapers and numerous smaller, multi-story residential or commercial buildings. The buildings are packed closely together, creating a complex pattern of colors and textures. The lighting is soft, suggesting either early morning or late afternoon, with a slightly hazy atmosphere. The overall tone is muted and somewhat desaturated, with a focus on the geometric forms and density of the city.

“The Genome Project gave us the letters of the DNA code that we all share.”
—Francis Collins, Director of The Human Genome Project

I M A G I N E L I F E

Launched in 1990, the objective of the Human Genome Project was to understand the genetic makeup of the human species. The project provided amazing insights into what makes people unique – and the same.

But according to some philosophers, the most common pattern we share is how we perceive and think about life: that we all imagine life in terms of how it ought to be, how it is, how it can be, or how it will be. This pattern seems to be encoded into the DNA of life.

The scriptures put names to the elements of the pattern:

1. *Creation*
2. *Corruption*
3. *Redemption*
4. *Restoration*

The following pages examine this universal picture of reality, using the ancient and the contemporary. As you read through them, reflect on how you imagine life.



THE WAY IT OUGHT TO BE

CREATION

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...God created people in his own image...God saw all that He had made and it was very good.” —*Genesis 1 (NLT)*

“If the world was how it should be, maybe I could get some sleep.” —*Jars of Clay*

I M A G I N E L I F E

According to the scriptures, we feel we're made for something better because we really were. God has "placed eternity in our hearts" (this longing for wholeness) as a reminder of his original intent for us: to be in perfect relationship with God, with ourselves, with other people, and with our planet.

"I refuse to accept the idea that the 'isness' of man's nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts him." —*Martin Luther King Jr.*

Why do we have this sense of "oughtness": that life should be better than it is? Because our current reality does not match God's original design. How it ought to be is not how it really is.

How do you feel about the world around you?

Does everything appear to be "good?"



THE WAY IT IS

CORRUPTION

“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless!...Everything is meaningless...All things are wearisome. What is twisted cannot be straightened. What is lacking is without measure... And so I hated life.” —*Ecclesiastes 1-2*

“Deep down you want to think that people are really good, but reality outweighs that.” —*Martin Scorsese*

I M A G I N E L I F E

Let's face it: life is messed up. Our relationships—with ourselves, with others, with the planet, and with God—are all broken. Why doesn't the way life is measure up to the way life ought to be? The answer is found in our fallen state, or condition.

We were created for wholeness, for harmony with God. But our selfishness and desire for autonomy—essentially our rebellion—dissolved the fabric of that fellowship. Humanity is fallen and can't get up.

Sin breached the relationship between God and humanity and when that was severed, like links in a chain, it uncoupled every relationship contingent to it: people with people (wars, murder, racism), man with woman (divorce, abuse, broken families), people with nature (pollution, species extinction), people with themselves (guilt, shame, fear). Like a broken strand of DNA, the result has been all manner of deformity within creation. Is there any hope for us?

How have you experienced brokenness in your own life?

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A road lined with green trees runs diagonally from the top left towards the center. To the right of the road, there is a small pond and a house with a blue roof. The surrounding fields are brown and appear to be recently plowed. The lighting suggests a low sun, creating long shadows.

THE WAY IT CAN BE

REDEMPTION

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

— *Colossians 1:13-14*

“The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That’s the point.” —*Bono*

I M A G I N E L I F E

Sensing our separation, we attempt to bridge the gulf that stands between God and us. Whether through charity or meditation, sex or drugs, fame or success, religion or philosophy, we are always seeking transcendence, always seeking redemption – freedom from the jail cell of self. But the canyon between human and Holy is too wide.

Deep down we long for renewal, for redemption. Somehow, somebody can make things right. Jesus—God incarnate—lived a perfect, sinless life and died on a cross in order to pay the penalty for our sin. And three days later, He rose from the dead, demonstrating his power to rescue us (and our world) from sin, death, and brokenness. Only he can give us true freedom and mend our relationships with God, others, and ourselves.

Because of what Jesus has done, you can be forgiven for everything you've ever done. Everything. You can have a relationship with God. You can experience redemption—true freedom—and the transformation of your life. You most certainly can.

What aspect of this redemption that Jesus offers resonates the most with you?



THE WAY IT WILL BE

RESTORATION

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared...God’s home is now among his people...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. Then the one sitting on the throne said, “Look! I am making everything new.”

—*Revelation 21 (NLT)*

I M A G I N E L I F E

“I believe in the kingdom come, when all the colors will bleed into one.” —*U2*

The Bible paints a very bright picture of the future for the people of God. Every single one of God’s children will be restored into perfect relationships – with each other, with themselves, and most importantly, with God: the Creator, Redeemer, and Restorer.

“God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.” —*C.S. Lewis*

God promises to restore more than personal relationships. He will restore everything in creation to its original intent, bringing true happiness, harmony, and peace. Once again, all will be “very good.”

But before you get to experience how life can be and will be, you have a decision to make. Because, unlike your genetic makeup, you need to play an active part in how the spiritual pattern of your life develops. Redemption and restoration are not forced upon you: you have a say in how it will be.

An aerial photograph of a landscape, possibly a river valley, with a large, billowing white cloud or smoke plume rising from the center. The terrain is a mix of brown and green, suggesting a mix of land and vegetation. The overall tone is muted and atmospheric.

SOMETHING TO

CONSIDER

I M A G I N E L I F E

YOU CAN TURN

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

—Acts 3:19

To repent doesn't just mean to feel remorse for our wrongdoing. It means to turn from our way to God's way. It means to admit that we are lost, that we're rebellious, and that we are desperate for God to rescue us.

YOU CAN TRUST

By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast.

—Ephesians 2:8,9

Faith, belief, trust: all these words express the means of knowing Christ. By placing our trust in him to save us—trusting in nothing but him alone—we can begin a relationship with God. And by God's grace, we can begin to see the restoration of all our relationships.

YOU CAN RECEIVE

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. —John 1:23

To “receive” Christ means to accept who He is and what He has done for you – to accept his death on the cross as payment for your sin. When you receive him, you receive redemption: true freedom.

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an

emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

YOU CAN KNOW

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

—1 John 5:13

What the world will be is somewhat outside of our control. What we will be is not. You can change what you will be by making a simple decision. Like saying, “I do” at a wedding, you can ask Christ into your life. You can know that you have the forgiveness of sin, know that you have a relationship with God, know that you have eternal life. If you choose, that’s exactly how it will be.

SO WHAT WILL IT BE?

You can receive Christ by faith right now in prayer. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

Jesus, I realize that my life isn't as it ought to be. I know that you're the only one who can make things right, so I want to place my faith in you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins to restore our relationship. I turn to you and receive you as my Savior and Lord, trusting in you alone for eternal life. I ask you to take control of my life: make me the kind of person you want me to be and bring restoration to all of my relationships. Amen.

NOW WHAT?

If you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you now have a new relationship with God that will never end. You may not feel any different, but your reality has changed: you have now experienced redemption. The way it could be is now the way it is. Like all relationships, your connection with God will take time to develop and mature. Here are a few suggestions to help you grow in your relationship with God—and, as a consequence, grow in your other relationships as well.

1. Spend a few minutes each day connecting with God through reading the Bible and praying. Start by reading one of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).
2. Get connected with other Christians. Find a group of people who love God and want to grow in their faith.
3. Look for opportunities to tell others about your decision to trust Christ and follow him.
4. Seek out ways to participate with Jesus in His ongoing work of redemption and restoration.

A great place to find help in developing your new relationship with God is at StartingWithGod.com

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