

God & me, ACTUALLY

Many Christ-followers have a toxic self-narrative, which makes it difficult—almost impossible—to embrace a transforming friendship with Jesus. We’ve grown up believing the voices on our ‘panel’ assessing our inadequacies, highlighting flaws, and comparing us to others.

By word, deed, or inference. . . through parent, relative, teacher, pastor, neighbor, stranger, “friend,” foe, coach, or culture. . . according to misperception, circumstance, neglect, or abuse, many Christ-followers assume the identity of “flawed,” “inadequate,” “failure,” “worthless,” or worse.

As if we were covered in excrement.

The lesson from Zechariah’s Old Testament ‘gospel’ is that the story of what ‘was’ need not forever name us. Our past doesn’t define our possibilities, value, or identity in God’s economy of grace.

How God Thinks About Us

What if this were true. . .

What if God created us to belong to His forever family, not just to bully us with do’s and don’ts?

In assessing His Creation, God calls us “Good.” No, even better—“very good.”¹ He later pens a heartfelt poem to remind us that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made”²—not the random byproduct of a primordial ‘soup,’ but sacred, bespoke beings hardwired with purpose and possibilities.

Preparing to cross into the Promised Land, God, the heavenly Father who fights for us, cautions us to carefully consider the land we will inhabit. Growing up in the desert and unacquainted with ‘city life,’ God’s mentoring helps us navigate a culture that can chew and spit us out. He offers us ten fundamentals for preserving our greatest joys.³

And, when the cosmic \$%#! hits the fan, and the world spins out of control, where is God then? Well, find the house where the light is on in the middle of the night, and you will discover God at the kitchen table with a yellow legal pad and a package of pencils, figuring out how no one might be separated from Him.⁴

Nobody’s perfect. There are times when we blow it. And when everything goes ‘south,’ God often sends us ‘north,’ where consequences are a grace leading to repentance and new beginnings. Despite our long and inglorious history of rebellion and sin, as we journey in the direction of ‘exile,’ we discover a small note peeking out of a pocket on our pack: “Never forget that you are precious, and I love you, and I would give the whole world for you.”⁵ After all we have done, He’s still with us. . . and for us, especially in our restoration.

And just so we don’t miss it, a floodlit billboard sponsored by the Apostle John flashes for the whole world to see, announcing that “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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”⁶ As clear as that is, apparently, somehow it’s not.

¹ Genesis 1:31.

² Psalm 139:14.

³ Deuteronomy 5:7-21.

⁴ 2 Samuel 14:14.

⁵ Isaiah 43:4.

⁶ John 3 :16-17.

And, to new Christ-followers raised as fodder for the pantheon of cosmic forces, without meaning or purpose, the Apostle Paul presses home the hitherto unthinkable: that God chose us and adopted us into His forever family, with lives energized by destiny and purpose.⁷

This God is said to be “able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”⁸ Don’t miss the last three words.

What if it’s true that God relates to us out of love rather than law, chasing us through the corridors of history, committed to preserving our greatest joys?

What if this were true?

4. PREPARING TO PARTICIPATE—*Relinquish*

“Unless we be aware, the Word, which is meant to point us to God, may actually intervene and hide Him from us. The mind may be occupied and interested and delighted at what it finds, and yet, because this is more head knowledge than anything else, it may bring little good to us. If it does not lead us to wait on God, to glorify Him, to receive His grace and power for sweetening and sanctifying our lives, it becomes a hindrance instead of a help.” (Andrew Murray, *The School of Obedience*, p. 54)

Preoccupied? Rest and be at ease until ready to be met. Busy and anxious about deadlines or demands? Take a deep breath, exhale, and again: Relax. Read only when your soul catches up with you.

⁷ Ephesians 1:4-5.

⁸ Jude 24.

5. ABSORBING SCRIPTURE—*Read*

Zechariah 3:1-7

After mastering the text, work hard at allowing the text to master you. Be aware of how God wants to meet you here.

¹ Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ² The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”

³ Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.”

Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put **fine garments** on you.”

⁵ Then I said, “Put a clean **turban** on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

⁶ The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: ⁷ “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘If you will walk in obedience to me and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.’”

3. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?—Think

This is where we do our homework, exploring the background and meaning of the passage. Helpful, free online resources include [BibleHub.com](https://www.biblehub.com), [Biblegateway.com](https://www.biblegateway.com), and [Blueletterbible.org](https://www.blueletterbible.org).

Key Observations

- **Fine garments**

Fine garments, Hebrew, *machalatsah*, used only here and Isaiah 3:22. From the Hebrew, *chalats*, meaning easily put on or taken off; changeable suit of apparel; a robe of state. These are multi-colored, intricately adorned "festal robes," costly clothes worn on festal occasions. These are not the white robes— symbols of innocence and righteousness worn by the high priest on the Day of Atonement—which we might expect here. Rather, these are symbolic of *glory*.

The festal robes point to a restored Joshua as God's glory.

The idea that humans reflect God's glory can be found in several passages. One key verse is Psalm 8:5, which says, "You made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor." This verse highlights the dignity and value given to humanity.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes about believers being transformed into the image of Christ, saying, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Similar to God calling us His *treasured possession*⁹ and *the apple of His eye*¹⁰, *fine garments* reveals what we mean to God and how He thinks about us.

- **Turban**

As Zechariah watched the defiled garment of excrement exchanged for festal robes, the scene was so vivid that he got caught up in the moment and could not help suggesting, "Put a clean turban on his head."

The Hebrew word, *tsaniph*, is translated as "turban." This is not the turban worn by just anyone, but princes and kings. It was synonymous with *mitsnepheth*, the technical word for the headpiece or turban prescribed for the high priest in the law (Exodus and Leviticus).¹¹

⁹ Deuteronomy 14:2, Psalm 135:4, and Exodus 19:5.

¹⁰ Psalm 17:8, Proverbs 7:2, Zechariah 2:8.

¹¹ In Isaiah 62:3, the turban royal diadem is called the *tsanip*. In Ezekiel 21:26, it is spoken of under the name *mitsnepheth*. A **royal diadem** refers to a crown or headband that symbolizes sovereignty and authority. The turban, or royal diadem, represents both the dignity of leadership and the responsibility of ruling justly. It is a symbol of power, honor, and divine favor bestowed upon those in authority.

The clean turban had a golden plate attached to the front of it:

³⁶ Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: Holy to the Lord. ³⁷ Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. ³⁸ It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.¹²

Functional vs Relational Meaning—This is significant!

The Hebrew phrase prominently featured on the gold plate worn by the high priest on his forehead, *kodesh YHWH*, translates as "Holy to the Lord." Many commentators choose the default meaning, "set apart for service to God," focusing on the role of the high priest among the people. However, this translation feels abrupt and out of synch with the context and the moment, which is celebratory and personal.

Rather than the **functional** meaning of "Holy to the Lord," referring to status and duty, the suggested translation here is the **relational** meaning, "You belong to me."

The relational meaning, "You belong to me," is supported in this context by two observations:

- 1) Joshua's restoration is solely based upon his relationship to God as "chosen" (v. 2), which expresses God's unconditional love and dedication to His creation.
- 2) Joshua is dressed in festal robes as an affirmation that he is God's "glory." This is a celebration of the joy God receives from seeing His image reflected in His creation. The connection here appears to be relational and not about duty or role (functional).

- **While the angel of the Lord stood by**

The angel of the Lord remained standing in the judge's seat, speaking while the celebratory robing was taking place. The meaning of this circumstantial clause is to show not only God's approval, but His participation. The process of this great reversal is under His protective guardianship and care. Joshua and God's people needed a way back to the presence of a holy God. They were helpless to do it on their own. "Standing by" is an assurance that God's extravagant love will protect and preserve His possibilities for making all things new.

4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?— Pray

¹² Exodus 28:36-38.

Not, “What does it mean *to* you? but “What does it mean *for* you?”

What does having a God committed to your greatest joys mean *for* you?

What is your experience of being God’s “glory”?

What obstacles do you experience here?

“You belong to me!” What does this personally mean *for* you?

5. CHOOSING GOD’S INVITATIONS—*Respond*

This is about activating our will and aligning our thinking and feelings with what God is inviting us into.

What will it mean for you to welcome and receive God’s invitations here?

In what ways will you need to reconsider how you think about or relate to God?

And, in what ways will you have to reconsider how you think about or relate to yourself?

TO PONDER

Prayerful interaction with a photograph, icon, piece of art, or other visual representation can invite us to an encounter with God uniquely and powerfully.



The Angelus
Jean-François Millet (c. 1857-1859)

The Angelus is an oil painting on canvas. It depicts two peasants during the potato harvest in Barbizon, France, with a view of the church tower from the neighboring city in the background. A small basket of potatoes is at their feet, and around them are a cart and a pitchfork. Millet said: "The idea for *The Angelus* came to me because I remembered that my grandmother, hearing the church bell ringing while we were working in the fields, always made us stop work to say the Angelus prayer for the poor departed."

Are you drawn to this work of art? Notice why or why not.

Can you see yourself in the scene? Pay attention to why or why not.

What do you sense, i.e., feel, smell, hear, see as a part of this scene?

What is your experience reflecting upon 'God's simple provision?'