

Galatians 1 (Part 3): 11-24 • The Witness of a Changed Life

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And we're in Galatians chapter 1, so if you're opened up there, let's get into it here. This is the third week of our first chapter. We're going to pick it up in verse 11, read through the end of the chapter. So follow along with me as I read, please. It says,

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the Church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and Who called me by His grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

Stop there. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open our hearts. Let the ministry of Your Word fill us, Lord through the ministry of Your Holy Spirit. Teach us, instruct us, illuminate our hearts, and guide us and direct us through these verses we pray. In Jesus' Name, amen. Amen.

What would you say to a brother or sister? And what I mean by that is a spiritual brother or sister, someone who you knew to be in Christ, a genuine born-again Believer, but who had started to go down a very dangerous path.

What would you say if you could say anything to them to help get them back where they needed to be with the Lord? I'm talking about somebody who has started on a path that is a very life and death kind of a— sort of a thing. Right? I mean, somebody who's really beginning to walk into some areas of error as it relates to understanding the gospel and what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross and so forth.

Well, that's the very situation the apostle Paul is facing here as he writes this letter to the churches in the region of Galatia. As we said in the past, there's probably about four or five churches that are involved here that Paul is writing to.

And they had been infiltrated by a group of Jews who came after Paul was there, and they were now trying to convince the people that Jesus was not enough to secure a person's eternal salvation. What they were telling the people was that they needed to submit to circumcision and also the keeping of the Mosaic law in order to be saved.

Paul is saying whatever he can say, in this letter, to try to bring these people to a place of thinking through once again, what they're doing, where they're going and all the implications involved in this as he sees them beginning to move away from the pure gospel that he spoke to them while he was there.

And now they're taking on this idea that Jesus isn't enough. There must also be these works and there must be this obedience to the law. And all that junk. And Paul's doing what he can to try to resolve this issue.

You know, there's something, there's just something about us human beings. We're an interesting sort. There's something about us that just wants to, well, let me say it a different way. There's something about us that feels uncomfortable about getting something for free. It feels like we're out of control.

If somebody's going to give me something and it's something that I know that I really need and somebody comes along and says, Hey, it's free. There's just something that makes us uncomfortable about that.

We are much more comfortable with the idea of having earned it. Having done something so that I can say there, I did it. I measured up. I earned it, I did whatever needed to be done. And now it's mine! And nobody can take it away from me because I know I did what they said I was supposed to do.

And so now— whoop, whoop – careful here, Paul, getting too animated (Pastor chastised himself as his laptop began sliding off the slant of pulpit), now it's mine and so forth. What's interesting is that what the gospel does is that it takes that control out of our hands. It takes it away and we have to put our control completely in what somebody else did. Right?

It's that feeling you get when you get onto an airplane, and it's like, Who is this pilot? I don't know him, or her. I don't know his name. I don't know if he had a bad day. You know, maybe he's got a headache. And I'm going to be flying in his airplane. Sort of a thing, you guys get it. It's the whole idea of just ... trusting.

And what it does is it smacks us right in the center of our self-sufficiency because I want to be able to do it myself. And then to put it into somebody else's hands and just trust them to do it, it's like [Pastor growls]. And what it does is— when I say it smacks us in the middle of our self-sufficiency, what I'm saying is it smacks us in our pride.

Because that's what self-sufficiency is essentially made of. I mean, that's the building blocks. It's pride. And have you ever noticed that to come to Christ, you have to swallow your pride? I mean, if you're really prideful, and you're one of those 'I did it my way' guys or gals, then the gospel is going to be a tough sell for you because there's nothing you can do.

You can't do it your way. Your way is going to wind you up in the hottest spot in Hell. Just saying. You know, you got to go— see, that's the gospel. You've got to trust Him. *You've got to trust what He did.*

And that's hard because the basic message of the gospel is you aren't good enough and you never will be.

We've said many times, in order to accept the good news, you have to come to terms with the bad news and the bad news hurts. It's uncomfortable. It offends us. Right?

The good news is Jesus is the Savior. The bad news is you need a Savior. The bad news is because you're a sinner, you need a Savior.

And so once we get past that— but the Bible has never tried to pull its punches related to trying to speak to you and I about the kind of people we really are, and our need for God, and His— and our need for His mercy. Let me give you,

first of all, an Old Testament example of this, from the book of Isaiah, on the screen here for you.

Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...

Chapter 64, verse 6: *All of us have become like one who is unclean.* Now, you and I, we hear the word unclean today and it sounds like somebody just didn't use enough soap and warm water.

But this is a Biblical term and those of us who have gone through the Old Testament, we've heard this repeated over and over and over. A person was considered “unclean” when they did various things under the Old Testament law, that basically disqualified them from worship. And actually, even being around other people.

Sometimes, if you got unclean, if you became unclean by touching a dead body or any number of other things, you would have to leave the congregation or the people. If they were encamped in the wilderness, you'd have to go outside the camp and stay there for a period of time until you were once again declared “clean” and you could come back in and worship with the rest of the worshipping community. That was how the Mosaic law dealt with that whole issue of clean and unclean, but it basically means unacceptable.

Unacceptable; unclean. So, what is God saying here? As He speaks through Isaiah the prophet, *all of us have become unacceptable.* And then He goes on to define that position, that unacceptable status. And He says, Even the best acts, he says, Your most righteous acts. That means the best version of you is just like a filthy rag before God. The filthy rag thing has its own Biblical meaning. I won't get into it. It's gross. But the point is, we're unacceptable. Okay?

And that's what the Old Testament has been telling us from the very beginning. You're unacceptable. Now the Jews came to a point of believing that they were acceptable, as long as they kept the law— and they believed they could do it and so forth.

But anyway, okay, here's the bad news from a New Testament perspective. Most of you know this next verse, Romans 3:23. I did a couple of highlights here in caps.

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

... for ALL have sinned and FALL SHORT of the glory of God,

...for ALL have sinned, that means all human beings, all humankind. We've all sinned, and we've *ALL fallen short of the glory of God*. None of us like to fall short, right?

I remember in high school, during taking tests, I constantly fell short. I was frankly not a very good student because I'm not a good guesser, and I don't take tests well, and it was particularly a problem because my dad was the superintendent. But anyway— there I was, falling short over and over and over again. And nobody likes to fall short.

You don't like to fall short at work. You don't like to fall short in your marriage. You don't like to fall short when it comes to test taking time. But here, the Bible says that *all of us have fallen short* when it comes to God's standard of righteousness and that sort of thing. We've *all fallen short*.

So, again, the Bible doesn't pull any punches. We're all unacceptable. We've *all fallen short*. There you go. That is the bad news. All right?

So, what do we do when we realize we're— we've fallen short? Well, I don't know about you, but if I'm going to think through this thing in my own man brain, I'm probably going to come up with a means by which I don't fall short.

In other words, I'm going to create a situation where I can be good enough, and that is essentially man's solution. Man's solution to the problem of eternal life is to come up with a means by which he can do it. I can do this. I can measure up.

Have I— remember me telling you guys: Biblical Christianity is the only belief system where it says you're not good enough and you never can be.

All the other belief systems say here's what you've got to do. Here's what you've got to do to measure up. And they have all the— and there's different— you know the people who come at your door, knock at your door or whatever. They're out earning their points to be good enough. They're trying to measure up. Okay?

Well, that's man's system, and if I was going to come up with my own religion, I don't recommend it, but I would come up with a system where I could measure up. That's man's way. We like to do that because it makes us feel good about

ourselves. It builds our self-esteem. Right? To say, I can do this. Here's what it takes, and I can do it. Right?

What does Paul say about the gospel that he brought to them when he came to the region of Galatia? Look at verse 11 in your Bible with me as we look at these verses again. He says, *For, first of all, I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.* Okay?

The point he was trying to say was, no man came up with this. And you know how you know? Because when man comes up with a “gospel,” it always has things that man has to do. And it is meant to, it is designed so that he can measure up. That's man's way of doing it.

Like I said, other than Biblical Christianity, every other belief system, which I believe was basically and essentially created by man, has a system built into it where you have to do certain things in order to measure up. Even some aspects of Christianity have become that. Right?

There are certain sectors of Christianity that have begun to add things that you have to do in order to be forgiven or whatever the case might be, here's what you've got to do. You go to somebody who's supposed to be in the know and they'll tell you, all right, here's what you need to do.

Well, that's not Biblical Christianity because Biblical Christianity is not man's gospel. It's not man's way. Man's way is providing a way for man to measure up. The Biblical gospel says you don't measure up and you never will.

It's just that. That's it. You never will measure up, and it's offensive for us to hear that. Right? We don't like hearing that. Nobody likes hearing that. You don't measure up and you never will. God's not trying to beat you down. He's just telling you the truth. And it's really important that we hear it.

So what Paul is saying here is, you know that this gospel that I brought to you had to come from God because it's not man's way of thinking. It's not the thing, the kind of thing that man would devise.

Do you guys remember in the gospel accounts there's that story of that young man, Jewish man, who came to Jesus? Essentially, he believed very strongly that he could measure up. And he came to Jesus and asked Jesus what he must do to measure up. He said, Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life? And what he was saying is, tell me what to do, because see, I believe that I can do

enough. I believe that I can be sufficient to do what needs to be done in order to be safe. So, Teacher, please tell me what do I need to do.

And then they had a conversation and Jesus showed the young man that he didn't measure up and he could never measure up and that's why the man walked away sadly and so forth.

But then Jesus went on to talk to His disciples after that little conversation and that's what gets really interesting. Let me put this on the screen for you. It's from Matthew chapter 19. Goes like this:

Matthew 19:23-26 (ESV)

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

²³ *And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person, and this particular guy had a lot of money, enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

We'll leave the scripture up here for just a little bit. Let me explain what's going on here. So, this young man who apparently had a lot of money, they're having this conversation and so forth, and Jesus speaks to him about the fact that he doesn't measure up, he can't measure up, he never will measure up, and as he's walking away sadly, Jesus begins to speak to His disciples.

And He says, wow, I tell you the truth. It is only with difficulty that a rich person can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, He goes on to say, *It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

By the way, He's talking about a real camel and a real eye of a needle. People have tried to redefine that. They've tried. Oh, I've heard some fanciful interpretations: No, you see what they used to do is... and they go through these

things about how the needle was actually what they called this certain gate in the wall of Jerusalem and the camels had to kneel down to get through it...

And you know what that interpretation is? It's people trying to measure up. They're trying to redefine these things so that they can come up with a system that says, Oh no, no, no. See, we can measure up. It's just hard. Right?

No. Listen. Did you hear what Jesus said? The disciples heard Him. Because even though He was talking about a rich man, He said, *It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.*

And they're thinking, well if it's tough, if it's like a camel going through the eye of a needle for a rich man, what is it for a poor man? Is it like a dog going through the eye of a needle? Because that would be just as hard. How about a kitty? How about a mouse? You ever tried to put a mouse through the eye of a needle? Hey, just try putting a worm through the eye of a needle, it would be pretty tough. Well, it'd be impossible.

And that's the point of what Jesus says. The disciples understood Him, and they said, well then, who then can be saved? They knew what He meant. Look what Jesus comes back and says, *with man this is impossible!* Did you guys get that? It's impossible. You can't be saved on your own. It's impossible.

But he doesn't leave us hopeless! He says, *But with God, all things are possible.* That's where we have to rely on mercy: His plan, His way, not ours; His work, not ours. Not our way, not our works, not our plan. You with me?

Because it's impossible. Oh, we Christians, if we would just read stuff like this and understand what it means! So, after talking to the people here in Galatia, as Paul is through this letter, and telling them that this gospel is obviously from God because man would never come up with a message that said, hey, here's a way to be saved, but you can't do it. I mean, we just wouldn't think that up. Right?

He goes on now in the latter part of these verses and he begins to talk about the ability that the gospel has to transform lives, to change people. Look in verse 13. He says, *For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.*

Paul is wanting to remind them, right here as he begins now, talking about this, that here they are being drawn into this law keeping by these Judaisers who've come to Galatia. And he's saying, they're telling you that you have to do these

things of the law. You have to be circumcised. You have to keep the law of Moses.

And he's starting off here by saying, you guys do remember my past, right? You remember that I was all about the law. I was a Pharisee. I was a Pharisee of Pharisees. I was stricter than any of those guys. However strict they were related to the law; I was on steroids compared to those guys. Right?

Look what he says in verse 14. He says, and *I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people. So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.* Paul is explaining to them that he was consumed by the law. He was consumed with the law and keeping the law and the traditions that went along with the law that the Jews had passed down over time. It was his life.

He ate it. He slept it. He breathed it. He drank it. This was everything. He was totally consumed with the law. This is an interesting sort of a thing for Paul to begin to say because he's talking to these people in Galatia and he's saying, hey, listen, you guys, you guys who want to follow the law, you think you're talking to somebody who doesn't understand the law? You think you're talking to a newbie here as it relates to the law?

Do you understand how focused I was on the law? How consumed I was with keeping the law and all of that? And you might think— and here's what he's trying to get them to come to terms with. When he was there, in Galatia, preaching the gospel to these people, he wants them to remember his message did not contain the law as it relates to the means of salvation or the way that a person is saved.

He didn't throw the law in, and he wants them to remember how obsessed he was with the law, and he wants them to ask this question: How does that happen? How does a man who has a Ph. D. in the law and was so zealous for the law, he was willing to go to great pains to get rid of these Christians, how does a man like that then completely turn around and do a 180 and begin to talk about the way to be saved that doesn't include the law?

In fact, any reference to the law doesn't come into play as it relates to salvation and a righteous standing before God. Look what he wrote to the Romans. From Romans chapter 3.

Romans 3:20 (NIV)

...no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law...

He said no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law. This is a man who was obsessed with the law. Just years before. And now he's writing to people and saying the law doesn't come into play when it comes to salvation; the law is not a mechanism by which we are saved.

And we're sitting back and we're thinking. Are you joking? See we take statements like this by the apostle Paul, and we just go, yeah, that's the apostle Paul. But some of these people, I mean, he's reminding them, I wasn't always the apostle Paul.

I was Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia. I was a Pharisee. I was a man who was so zealous for the law, I was willing to do whatever it would take to get rid of these people. And I was doing more than anybody.

If you had known Saul of Tarsus, if you had known him, and then you came to hear that he was writing to people, telling them that the law didn't come into play as it relates to our salvation, you would say, no, that can't have been written by Saul of Tarsus. I'm sorry, I know Saul of Tarsus. He's all about the law.

No, no, no, no. He wrote that. He writes, right there, Romans, his letter to the Romans. How do you do that? What has to happen in a person's life for them to have such an incredible transformation that they change their minds on all this stuff? That's what Paul's trying to explain here; look at verse 15.

He says, *But when He Who had set me apart before I was born, and Who called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.* He (Paul) begins to talk about some things that we're going to deal with next time when we go through Galatians.

When we get into chapter two, he's going to talk about how he didn't immediately consult with anybody, didn't go up to Jerusalem right away, talk to the apostles.... In fact, he went to go spend some time in Arabia and then he didn't— instead of going to Jerusalem, he went back to Damascus, hung out there for a while.

And then after three years he finally went up to Jerusalem; hung out with Peter for about 15 days, saw James, and again, when we get into chapter 2, we'll refer back to these verses and I'll tell you how they play in.

Here's the point of all of this. He says in verse 22, look with me there now, verse 22. He says, *And I was still basically unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ* because I was only there for 15 days. I didn't have nearly enough time to get to know those people.

Look what he says in verse 23. *They were only hearing it said, He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.* And look what it says in verse 24. *And they glorified God because of me.*

If you have an NIV that you're looking at here this morning, your Bible says, *And they praised God because of me.* But actually, that's not a great translation because that's not typically the word that we translate 'praise.' This word specifically should be translated 'glorified' because in the Greek—listen to this; this is interesting. In the Greek it means to esteem someone as glorious.

Here's what Paul's saying. When they looked at the transformation that happened in my life where I went from being zealous for the law and willing to kill people, to then preaching the very gospel that these people held dear. When I went from being a persecutor of the gospel to being a preacher of the gospel, they esteemed God as glorious because of the transformation that had taken place in my life. Right?

Again, we are so fixated in our culture on self-esteem and building self-esteem. Paul makes note of the fact that when people looked at his life, it didn't build Paul's self-esteem. People esteemed God as glorious and they were like, Wow! Look what God did—when they looked at the life of Paul because they saw in that transformation something that was miraculous.

They knew that they knew that they knew that that was something only God could do. And so they esteemed Him as glorious. When we look at what happened in somebody's life and we see that it is unmistakably a work of God, we can't help but glorify God. We can't help but say, Wow! Look what God did.

You've probably noticed that we like to do that sort of thing in our advertisements. We like to have comparisons. We like to compare the old with the new, or what was with what now is. And we, that's the way they sell diet programs. Look at Sally here: she weighed, [incoherent] pounds.

And now, after being on the something plan, look at her now! And we have this split screen where Sally is looking very sad and incredibly overweight. And here she is, looking [great]. And we all go, ooh, and we start sending, spending our dollars to be on that same diet plan because we want to look just like Sally.

Or I remember when I was reading comic books when I was a kid. I was completely taken in by the drawings in the back of the comic book showing this 98-pound weakling getting sand kicked in his face. And if you'll just do this— sign up for the— I don't even know what they were offering because I couldn't afford whatever it was, but then they had a picture of a guy who was buff, and the girls were falling all over him. And I was like, yeah, that's what I want.

Again, we see the before and the after picture of the 98-pound weakling and then this guy who's buff and cut. Yes! The Bowflex! For just 98 simple payments of \$1,000 you too can be buff and cut.

Or we like makeovers. Sue and I used to watch that show where they would grab people on the street, *Ambush Makeover*. You ever seen that? It's funny. Somebody's just walking along, minding their own business, and they grab them and they're usually looking very plain and very haggard and whatever, and then they bring them in and do their hair. And new clothes and makeup and stuff like that and then again, at the end of the show we see the split screen with the old and the new. And we're just like wow!

You know they're never going to look like that again because nobody goes home and has that kind of resource to make that kind of magic happen. But that's alright. It's all part of what they're trying to accomplish.

But you know what? When we come to Christ, we get a makeover. Jesus changes people. And you and I have the precious privilege to be able to share with others the before and the after picture of what He has done in our lives.

And if I had the time to let some of you do that, some of you would be able to stand up and describe your life before you came to Christ and the way it is now. And if you're like me, you don't even know that person anymore— when you think about the person you used to be. And you've heard me multiple times stand up here and give the testimony of my own life and talk about how God took a young man who had vowed to never darken the door of a church again in his life and here I am pastoring one.

That's God! You know what I'm saying? Testimonies are just wonderful. Listen to this. Pastor Steve Yetchik, Crystal Lake, Illinois, described his sister Judy as a party animal, a big drinker with a self-contented lifestyle. She was someone everybody loved because she just exuded excitement and a thrill for life.

And when Steve tried to share Christ with her over the years, she would laugh it off and just keep partying. But at the age of 44, her world caved in when she

discovered she was very sick. She later learned her husband was having an affair. He subsequently announced he didn't love her anymore and left her.

It was in that context that she began to ask questions of an eternal nature and later prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior. From that time until she went home to be with the Lord, Jesus Christ and His Word and purpose became her life, her very priority. With the same gusto she lived life as an unbeliever, she now approached her new life in Christ.

Her greatest aim was winning others to Jesus. She boldly shared her faith, even as she was undergoing surgery after surgery. Judy ultimately came to see that the greatest miracle would be for her friends and family to come to know Christ. She talked her way out of the hospital so that she could be baptized and publicly proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation. Judy invited everyone she knew to come to her baptism service.

And under the Holy Spirit's anointing, she powerfully and urgently shared her testimony. Her 84-year-old father came to Christ that night and was baptized, along with her ex-husband, a number of her nieces, a college roommate who was a New Age cultist, her aunt, her sister, and others. Ten days later, Judy slipped into the arms of Jesus, and when Steve, her brother, read the message that she had prepared to be read at her funeral service, another 100 people prayed to receive Christ that day.

And that's just one testimony of a transformed life. Cut to the split screen. Judy before, probably with a bottle in her hand, looking like she'd been living a hard life. Now the other side of the screen, with joy radiating from her face, doing everything she can, spending every last moment she had to let people know what Jesus had done for her, to her, so that they too would be able to come along for the same ride that she had taken. And that's just one testimony.

I share this with you because here is the apostle Paul writing to people who are heading down a dangerous path, and he begins to just talk about the difference that Jesus made in his life. You guys know, he said, my previous life, you know the kind of a guy I was, you know how sold out I was to the law.

And you know the gospel that I preached to you. You know the transformation that Jesus made in my life to make me into a completely different person. I mean, good grief— I think we all ought to get a new name. Don't you think just like Saul and Paul; I think we all, when you get saved, you ought to get a new name, because the transformation is that incredible, that powerful.

I want to encourage you. Some of you guys have not been sharing your faith with others because you feel intimidated that you don't know enough of the Bible to really hold your own. And I get that, I do. And I don't want to belittle you for that because, we're all in the process, we're all growing, we're all learning, and a lot of us feel incomplete, at least in the sense of our ability to kind of articulate the Word of God at just the right time with just the right words. I get that.

But you know what? Regardless of where you are in your walk with God, you have a testimony. You have a testimony of what Jesus did in your life and how He is, present tense, changing your life for the better. I would encourage you to share that with people. Paul thought it was a worthwhile thing to do, to just start saying, hey, let me tell you about the kind of a life that I used to live.

I always kind of felt like— I never wanted to, I was always thankful that God never called me to go back to Minnesota. And be a teacher of His Word there because everybody knew what a dweeb I was when I lived there. And, I mean, I was, yeah, not going there. But I was not the picture of a Christian, not even close to living that kind of a lifestyle.

And I always kind of thought, boy, thank you, God. But part of me would like to go back and let people see the transformation because that's not something that you and I can lay claim to, to say, look what I did with my life. Right? All we can say is, wow, look what God did, you know? He took this life and He transformed it. And it's His life.