## KYLE WORLEY



# HOME WITH GOD

OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

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Author uses italics to show emphasis in many Scriptures throughout the text.

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To Lauren—Delight of my heart. I love you.

To Lydia—God the Father speaks to his children perfectly what I say to you imperfectly: There is nothing you can do, no where you can go, where I won't love you forever.

To Mom and Dad—I learned the beauty of home with God, by learning of God's love in your home. I receive the spiritual inheritance you have entrusted to your children with joy and sobriety; I will keep it because God will keep me. You have done well, rest in being beloved.

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#### Introduction

## The Invitation

"In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song."
—"In Christ Alone"
by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, 2001

I thought God wanted me to invite Christ to live in my heart.

I thought this was the Christian life. You tell Jesus you accept Him into your life. He forgives you. Then you wait for death or heaven. Trying to be as good as you can in the waiting.

I was wrong.

And maybe you were too.

The first time I heard the invitation, the pastor said, "Right now, you can pray and accept Christ into your heart. God is inviting you to welcome Him into your life, tonight." And I prayed this prayer with all my energy. I walked out of the church into the fading light of an east Texas sunset and I knew God had saved me.

I was convinced that God had just made His home in my heart, but as it turned out, something far more wonderful had

occurred: God welcomed me into His home in Christ Jesus. I was united to Christ, by grace, through faith.

I do not regret the prayer I prayed many years ago. While it's not the main emphasis of the New Testament, it is wonderfully true that God takes up residence in His people by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. If you have prayed a similar prayer, I don't want you to regret it either. Our heavenly Father is gracious and kind enough to hear the feeble prayers of the Spirit stirring faith's first sounds and receiving them in the faithfulness of Jesus. If we all had to say the magic words perfectly in order to receive God's gift of salvation, then we'd be in a real mess because there aren't any magic words and we can't do anything perfectly.

I don't blame the preacher who gave the invitation. I am grateful for the gospel message I heard and I am grateful I was invited to look to Jesus Christ for salvation.

In truth, it seems easier to invite Christ into our lives than to receive an invitation to live in Him. Living in Christ has often felt too abstract, but in an effort to make the gospel invitation more "actionable," we may be in danger of having made the gospel invitation less "wonderful."

We are born into the world longing for our true home. We look everywhere. Every face we see, every hand we hold, every bite we take, every dream we have, every tear we cry, every kiss we receive is a question: Is this where I belong? Is this home?

#### THE INVITATION

But we have homeless hearts and we can't find the way home. Try as we may, we enter this world lost, unrighteous, and estranged.

This is the beauty of the good news: God invites us as we are to receive our home with Him in Christ Jesus right now. We don't have to return to a garden or wait for heaven to live with God.

This invitation into home with God is called union with Christ.

It has changed everything for me. And I believe it can change your life too.

#### CHAPTER 1

## Our Home with God

e've all heard it: Home is where the heart is. But we are born into this world, all of us, regardless of the condition of our earthly homes, with homeless hearts. It wasn't supposed to be this way; we were created to live at home with God. And this life with God is still possible. But only if we receive a new home.

God is inviting you to make your home with Him. And it's possible to live with God, because God is inviting you to live in God. This discovery is central to learning, to live as a beloved and free child of God. Unfortunately, many of us haven't heard that God is inviting us to live at home with Him. Or if we have, the invite was for a future home on the other side of heaven's gates. Certainly not an invitation to live with Him now, in this life.

I can still remember the first time I heard this invitation. I walked into a classroom on a Friday over ten years ago, and by the time I left, everything was different. That day, my professor opened up Ephesians and as he read, he would raise his voice every time he ran across the phrase "in him." After he read most of the letter, he started quickly turning the pages of his Bible, his eyes lit up, and his voice raised.

- "For if we have been *united with him* in a death like his, we shall certainly be *united with him* in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5).
- "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).
- "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God *in Christ Jesus* our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).
- "For as in Adam all die, so also *in Christ* shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).
- "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).
- "... yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed *in Christ Jesus*, in order to be justified by faith in Christ..." (Gal. 2:16).

- "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).
- "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours *in Christ Jesus* . . ." (Phil. 2:5).
- "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, *in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13–14).

I was floored. I had heard these verses before. I had grown up in the church. I was a seminary student. I had been in full-time ministry for years. But as I sat there, my whole view of salvation turned right side up. Don't get me wrong, the professor wasn't saying something that had never been said before. He wasn't saying something the fathers and mothers of the church hadn't said many times in many ways before. I just had not been listening.

During the lunch break, I rushed to the professor and proceeded to ruin his lunch by pestering him with questions. After what must have been one question too many, he looked at me, placed his heavy hand on my shoulder and in his thick Scottish accent said: "Mr. Worley, isn't it too wonderful to believe? It's all *in* Jesus. All of God's blessings. Right there for you, for me, and for all the rest of His children." Then he walked back in to resume class. But I didn't. I couldn't. I was too busy crying.

I walked out of the little office building where the seminary held classes in a daze, my vision blurry from tears. I walked around the neighborhood for the next few hours, my heart trying to catch up with my head. Everything had changed for me. I had been a disciple of Jesus for the majority of my life, but I had grown up believing the most significant question was: Do you want Christ to live in you? I had "accepted Christ into my heart." Now I was being asked a different question, one the Bible seems more interested in asking: Do you want to live *in* Christ?

#### What Is Union with Christ?

Life with God is possible. In Christ Jesus. Only in Him can we make our home with God. And home with God is what we were created for; it's what we deeply desire; it's what we desperately need.

I define union with Christ this way: *Union with Christ is the* believer's identification, incorporation, and participation in and with the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

To say it another way: Union with Christ is our home with God. Our union with Christ creates a new me, a new we, a new way, and sets us on the adventure of abiding.

Our union with Christ is not merely the place where we receive forgiveness. Because forgiveness isn't the goal of God's salvation. Forgiveness is the foundation of fellowship. God

doesn't save us so we can merely be forgiven; He saves us so we can be welcomed. In Christ, we aren't merely *acquitted*; we are also *accepted*. It is in our union with Christ that we are welcomed into beloved fellowship with God. It is in union with Christ that we are welcomed into life with God. We can live *with* God the Father, because God invites us to live *in* God the Son, *by* the power of God the Holy Spirit. Where we receive God's blessings isn't a place, it's a person. As a Texan, I have to say, "God bless Texas." As a Christian, I am invited to believe all of God's blessings are for us *in* Christ. Don't believe me? Consider Ephesians 1:3–10:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us *in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons *through Jesus Christ*, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us *in the Beloved*. *In him* we have redemption *through his blood*, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of

his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth *in Christ* as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things *in him*, things in heaven and things on earth.

It has been said of this passage, it is so beautiful it should not be read, only sung. I know most people skip passages of Scripture in books like this. If you skipped it, I promise I won't tell anyone, go back and read it. No really. Go back and read God's Word.

It's unbelievable, isn't it? And this language is everywhere across the Bible. You may be asking, "If it's important, why haven't I heard about it before?"

The doctrine of union with Christ is often overlooked, in part, because it lives in the prepositions of the New Testament. I am sure it's frustrating to our high school English teachers, but we don't spend too much time worrying about pesky prepositions. We read past them, as if they are transitional words that take us to the real action. Yet they are essential to exploring God's invitation to making our home with Him in Christ. As Sinclair Ferguson has said, "there is a grammar to the gospel." Because the prepositions in the Bible are skimmed past, we miss how essential they are to the gospel grammar. But there is treasure locked into these phrases: "in Christ, with Christ, through Christ, into Christ, of Christ." To say we are "in Christ," the most common designation we find of this sort, is to say that Christ is now our primary residence. We reside in Him, we live in Him, we are at home in Him.

Beyond the grammatical, there has been a neglect of the doctrine of union with Christ because it can seem too abstract. The union we share is a "spiritual" union and has been referred to as a "mystical" union. But to call it mystical or spiritual is not to imply it's less real than the chair you're sitting on right now; it's to acknowledge that the union with Christ we receive by God's grace through the gift of faith is not perceptible to the human eye. How do I reside in Christ? If you were to cut Him open, would you find me there inside of His resurrected body? No, I am not physically united to Christ, I am spiritually united to Christ. It is a mystical union. It can't be seen with the eye, but it can be received by the heart.

When we talk about life with God in Christ, we are talking about the doctrine of union with Christ. A doctrine is a belief, and Christian doctrines are Christian beliefs. When we are exploring Christian doctrine, we are doing the work of theology. We are all theologians—the only question is whether or not we are any good at it. And here is some good news for us: we don't have to try to do theology on our own!

Theologians throughout the history of the church have been drawn to the centrality of union with Christ. One of my favorite theologians, John Calvin, described our union with Christ as:

that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that

Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him.<sup>2</sup>

Later on, Louis Berkhof defined it as "that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation." And John Frame has said, "In Christ, is the most general thing that can be said about us as his people."

Union with Christ is one of the most fundamental Christian beliefs (or doctrines) about salvation. Unfortunately, even with all that has been written about this incredible reality, it still takes many Christians far too long to discover it.

#### Christ in Me

The Bible is overwhelmingly clear in its emphasis. While we most commonly refer to ourselves as Christians, you might be surprised to discover the word *Christian* is only used three times in the Bible. Far more often we discover the primary way of naming

a follower of Jesus is to say they are "in Christ." Additionally, we find a handful of references to Christ living in us.

- Romans 8:10: "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness."
- Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
- Galatians 4:19: "... my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"
- Ephesians 3:17: ". . . so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love . . ."
- Colossians 1:27: "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

These passages should not be minimized. It is a glorious reality that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ dwells in our lives. Christians believe that God is Trinity; that God is three in one. Part of the mysterious nature of our union with Christ is that not only does God invite us to live in Christ,

He invites us to receive His indwelling presence in the Holy Spirit. This is called "mutual indwelling." When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within our lives, even while He re-homes us to live with God in Christ.

Our union with Christ is both: Christ in us and us in Christ. We are in Christ and Christ is in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, but the overwhelming emphasis in Scripture is on the believer *in* Christ Jesus. And I believe it is fitting for us to place our focus there for three reasons:

- Our salvation is not secure because we are holding on to Christ in our life, but because He is holding on to us in His.
- Christ is in us because we are in Him. There would be no Christ in us if we were not in Him for it is in Jesus where we are gifted with the Holy Spirit.
- 3. The focus of the New Testament is overwhelmingly weighted toward us in Christ over Christ in us.

It is in Jesus Christ where we are welcomed by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, along with all of God's children throughout history and the world, into the warm fellowship of God's covenant love. This union with Christ is the unbreakable foundation for the Christian adventure of communion with God.

#### Is It in the Bible?

You remember there was a man named Saul who we first encounter at the stoning of Stephen, a deacon and the first martyr of the early church. Saul helped to preside over Stephen's execution (Acts 8:1), which started an outbreak of persecution against Christians. It's important to remember at this point, Jewish religious leaders viewed the Christ-followers as a blasphemous branch of Judaism, and Saul was zealous to blot them out. He was at the tip of the spear for this persecution. It wasn't entirely clear yet what these Christians were up to, but it was clear they believed the claims Jesus Christ had made about Himself and they were worshipping Jesus, organizing their lives around Jesus's teachings, and inviting other people to do the same.

After Stephen's death, we hear Saul, who was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belong to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1–2). Saul sets out to Damascus, intent on finding Christians and bringing them to Jerusalem for judgment.

But what happens?

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are

you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:3–9)

You probably are familiar with this story, but do you know what we find in this story of God's confrontation of Saul? We find the doctrine of union with Christ. After the blinding light, Saul hears Jesus ask him a question: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul, probably terrified, asks: "Who are you, Lord?" And how does Jesus respond to him? "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Now, wait a second. Where is Jesus Christ at the moment of Saul's Damascus Road experience? He has already ascended to the right hand of God the Father. He isn't physically present in Damascus, is He? And yet at the same time, Christ is speaking here to Saul. In this moment, Saul is being confronted with more than a blinding light, but a beautiful truth: the Lord Jesus Christ identifies so intimately with His people that to persecute them

is to persecute Him. Why? Because His people, the Christians in Damascus and all Christians throughout all times and places, are *in* Christ Jesus. This is what it means to be a Christian, to be someone who is now in Christ Jesus. Christ is both at the right hand of the Father and present wherever His people are for they are in Him and He is with, in, and among them. Even though this union is mystical or spiritual, it is very real. You might even say: it's blindingly real.

I don't think it's any surprise Paul (the name Saul went by in Roman contexts) goes on to become the chief theologian of union with Christ. From the moment Paul encountered Jesus Christ, he was encountering the mystery and wonder of God's invitation to His people to live their life with God in Christ Jesus. He was encountering the reality that God's people are welcomed into God's presence through their union with Christ Jesus. We are invited into God's presence because we are in Christ Jesus. And in Christ Jesus is where we are declared righteous, beloved, forgiven, glorious, and so much more.

I believe that as Paul began to reflect on the story of Scripture in light of his Damascus Road encounter, he began to see that God had always been interested in welcoming His people into His fellowship. And this invitation, since the entrance of sin into the world, has always been the offer of a refuge for redemption, a shelter for salvation, a new home.

This is where we have to begin. In order for us to appreciate what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, we need to retrace the

story of the Bible. When we do this, we will see our union with Christ is the perfect fulfillment of what God had for His people from the beginning.

This book is split into two parts. Part One will be focused on the story of home with God. We will begin our journey where the story starts, in the garden of Eden, and we will journey all the way to the end of the story at heaven's gates. Part Two will be focused on how this story shapes our understanding of what union with Christ means for the identity, the belonging, the experiences, and the journey of the Christian.

#### A Note on "Home"

Before we go further, I know the word *home* might not bring thoughts of a place of protection, comfort, and delighting love. For some of us, *home* sets off alarms. Alarms that make you think of danger instead of delight, control instead of comfort, and poison instead of protection. I know the sorrows of your heart might grieve a home that never was. A home that has remained a mirage or a wound. While all of God's people will experience unique freedom as they consider what God has done for them in Christ Jesus, I believe the doctrine of union with Christ carries a particular benefit to those of you who have experienced homes of hurt, lost loves, and wounds instead of welcome.

I invite you to consider that for all of us, God has shown us the way home. And it begins in a garden.

**Reflect:** Why are you reading this book? What do you hope to learn or experience?

**Discuss:** Before reading this chapter, how would you have answered the question, "What is a Christian?"

# What if we've missed the most wonderful truth about salvation?

You and I were created to live at home with God. Not just in some far future heavenly world. But right now.

You and I are invited to live at home with God in Christ Jesus. This invitation is called "union with Christ." It is one of the most unbelievable and overlooked realities of Christian salvation.

In this book, Kyle Worley guides readers along the story of Scripture to help them understand that this invitation into life with God in Christ is not only a key part of the Bible's entire message, but also, the primary belief of Christian salvation. In *Home with God*, you will discover how the Christian's union with Christ creates a new me, a new we, and a new way of living in and living out God's story.



KYLE WORLEY is a pastor, teacher, author, and podcast host. He is the host of the *Knowing Faith Podcast* with Jen Wilkin and J. T. English which reaches millions of listeners each year. He is the author of *Formed for Fellowship: Becoming What You Behold* (B&H) and one of the founding partners of Training the Church. You can find out more about him at KyleWorley.net or follow him on social media @kyleworley.



