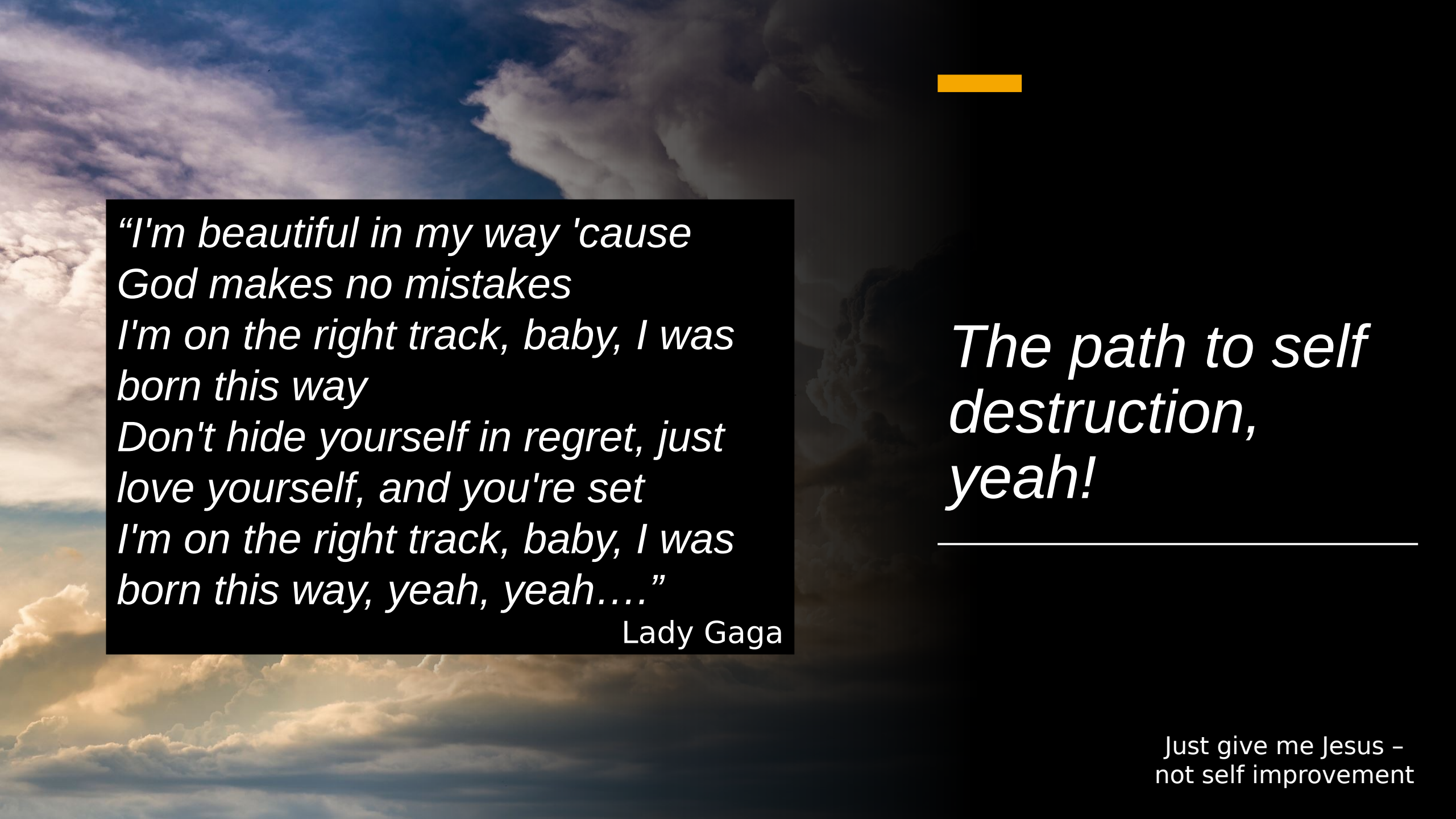




*Just give me
Jesus:
Not self
improvement*

October 29, 2023



*“I'm beautiful in my way 'cause
God makes no mistakes
I'm on the right track, baby, I was
born this way
Don't hide yourself in regret, just
love yourself, and you're set
I'm on the right track, baby, I was
born this way, yeah, yeah....”*


Lady Gaga

*The path to self
destruction,
yeah!*

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not self improvement

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it **you shall surely die.**”

Genesis 2:15-17



“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”

Genesis 1:27-31

And they ate it, and they became dying creatures.

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And they ate....

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, **lest you die.**'" But the serpent said to the woman, "**You will not surely die.**" For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, *and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* **Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.**

Genesis 3:1-7

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God decides and directs His creation....

- " The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
The LORD God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he (woman's offspring) shall bruise your head,
and you (serpent's offspring) shall bruise his heel...."

15

Genesis 3:13-
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God decrees

The creator provides outcome for rejection

Mankind rejects

Proposes own path (fig leaves)

God intervenes

Mankind sentenced to death – as dying
creatures

Man and women cast out of the garden


Man to till the soil to provide for the
woman.

Woman to bear children to continue the
race

The **offspring of the woman** would
provide a Savior to destroy the **offspring of
the serpent**- power of sin.

We make a choice between the two.
However, to choose the offspring of
the serpent is to reject God.

That is choosing self.



*And so the eternal
struggle began
between the mind of
God and the mind of
the man he had
created.*

Behold, I was brought forth in
iniquity, and in sin did my
mother conceive me.

Psalms 51:5

It's simple. God made us. God knows best

- Here is the problem. God made us: "...invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He, Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way (sorry Lady G) without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

C.S. Lewis Institute

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improvement

“Follow your dreams”

“March to the beat of your own drummer”

“Be true to yourself”

“Follow your own heart and our own truth”

“Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps”

“I did it my way”

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“I look at me!”



Our own lyricists

Our own publishers

Our own paparazzi

Our own worst enemy



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Too many people today tragically follow a fairy tale god. The God of Scripture is not our life coach. He is our Lord. We're used to this word as Christians, and so it loses its edge. This divine title signifies that God is ultimately our master. He is our sovereign. He is our ruler. He sets the tone for right and wrong. **He calls us to account for our sin....**

Wrong teaching on this point is why so many of us believe that Christian discipleship is synonymous with self-improvement.

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him”. John 12:25-26

True Christian discipleship is a call to die to self, not to improve our “self.”

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A Growing Danger

Moralistic therapeutic deism includes the belief that the primary goal of life is personal happiness and a positive self-image. God is viewed as rather distant from our day-to-day lives but available to solve problems and help us feel good about ourselves.

But that god is **not** the God of the Bible, nor does this pattern of teaching even come close to the walk of faith and salvation as set out for us in the Bible.

Jesus was speaking about here is personal strength or power. But Christ's power is the nutrient the branches receive. All the power lies in the vine itself. The centrality of Christ for living the Christian life has gotten buried in recent years by a way of thinking about Christianity called "moralistic therapeutic deism." It's a cumbersome term, but it's important to grasp, because it's everywhere, even within churches.

According to Jesus, we are branches:

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."
(John 15:1–2)*

**Moralistic therapeutic
deism**

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Moralistic Therapeutic Deism....

- Moralistic Therapeutic Deism presents a unique understanding of God. This amorphous faith "is about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs--especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance."
 - **Soul Searching:** The Religious and Spiritual Eyes of American Teenagers by Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton

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The new dominant religion....

- **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism** is also "about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents." As the researchers explained, "This is not a religion of repentance from sin, of keeping the Sabbath, of living as a servant of sovereign divinity, of steadfastly saying one's prayers, of faithfully observing high holy days, of building character through suffering, of basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice, et cetera. Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among North Americans is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."

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Sin: out of step with the times....

- This radical transformation of Christian theology and Christian belief replaces the sovereignty of God with the sovereignty of the self. In this therapeutic age, human problems are reduced **to pathologies in need of a treatment plan.** Sin is simply excluded from the picture, and doctrines as central as the wrath and justice of God are discarded as out of step with the times and unhelpful to the project of self-actualization.
- Never forget: You were dead in your sins. You could not help yourself. But then God, who is rich in mercy, made you alive in Christ because of his great love for us....Eph. 2:1 -13

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When it comes to self-improvement and self-help goals and methods, whether we hope to be more physically fit, more socially engaged, more financially successful, more intellectually accomplished, or even more spiritually disciplined, we must take great care.

These goals, while they may seem harmless and even good, can swiftly become **idols**. Instead of pointing us to the only one who will most satisfy us, they can tempt us to focus on ourselves, on our own successes and failures. Then we begin to place our hope and identity in these endeavors.



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A short list of various therapies and approaches to deal with the human condition....

**Empower
Yourself**

**Goal-
setting**

**Meditation
therapy**

**Positive self-
talk.**

Acupuncture

**Self-help
strategies and
complementary
therapies**

**Relaxation
techniques**

**Medication
therapy**

**Online
therapy**

Yoga

**Transcranial magnetic
stimulation**

Faith Counseling

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Self lovers....

- The problem is obvious when we look at what society advocates in comparison to God's design for our lives. **The world promotes self-help, self-improvement, self-reliance.** Our culture says, "Get glory by achieving your dreams!" It encourages us to focus on ourselves and our desires in order to find fulfillment—and no wonder, for we are naturally self-lovers.
- "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be **lovers of self**, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 2 Timothy 3:1-5
- But God's Word calls His children to **self-control, self-denial, and God-reliance.** We are to fix our eyes not on ourselves but on our gracious, glorious Savior, who deserves all honor and praise. not self improvement us, give me Jesus -

You can't put Jesus on a shelf....

- The problem with the world's way of thinking is that it is opposed to the **essence of following Jesus - which is self-denial, not self-improvement.** Ultimately, through self-improvement you are trying to come to a place where you are proud and comfortable with who you are. But the more you look to yourself for your worth and happiness, the unhappier you will become. When we move toward self-improvement, we are relying less on Jesus, and more on ourselves. If we do not place Jesus on the throne of our lives we are cheating Him by not giving Him enough of ourselves. We cannot just put Jesus on a shelf for when we need him - for there are many other things that you can put over and under that shelf, but nothing can ever measure up to Jesus and what He adds to our lives and our journey of faith and salvation.

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Who sits on your throne?

- **“God can’t give us peace and happiness apart from Himself because there is no such thing”**. C.S. Lewis
- God deserves nothing less than the throne in our lives, and until we can relinquish our chair we cannot truly follow him.

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All right, have it your way....

- In his book *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis says: There are two kinds of people: those who say “**My will be done,**” And those who say to God, ‘**Your will be done**’
- And to those who say to God ‘**My will be done.**’” God simply says “All right, then, have it your own way....”
- When God is not first in our lives, when we refuse to deny ourselves for the sake of Jesus His son, God basically lets us have our own way, which is the worst thing that could happen to us.
- “There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death.” Prov. 14:12
- “See, this alone I found, that God made man upright (in the beginning), but they have sought out many schemes.” Ecc. 7:29

RESTING FROM THE NEED TO ACHIEVE

- The world thinks this kind of sacrifice is absurd: "How can followers of Jesus possibly be content if they are always denying themselves, always pouring themselves out?" This is an excellent question. Even many professing Christians struggle in their faith; we feel as though we are always giving, always sacrificing—and we don't feel rewarded. The problem is that we are still looking at ourselves; we are still focused on our work, our service, our accomplishments—even when it is for God. But that's not how God wants us to live the new life He's given us. **Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary, and I will give you rest"**

(see Matthew 11:28-30).

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My response:

- “**His divine power has granted to us all things** that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” 2 Peter 1:3-4
- If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. 1 Timothy 4:6-10

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Out of the heart....

- And Jesus said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, **out of the heart of man**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”
 - Mark 7:20-23
- Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**
 - 1 John 2:15-17

The fix is in....

- “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. James 4:6-8
- Therefore, just as **sin** came into the world through one man, and death through **sin**, and so death spread to all men because all **sinned**— Romans 5:12
- Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's **disobedience** the many were made **sinners**, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Romans 5:18-19
- “...so that, as **sin** reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:21

Knowing Him....

- “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
 - Philippians 3:8-11

So, walk in Him....

- “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.
- “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving..
 - Colossians 2:6-13

Just give me Jesus....

- “...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**” Philippians 4:11-13
- “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19



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