

The 3Rs 4th R: Revived
2 Corinthians 5:17
Sunday, August 23, 2026

I recently read a book titled “My Friends” by one of my very favorite authors, Frederik Backman. The book is about a painting and the people associated with it. More generally, the book is about art. And the premise of the book is that *real* art isn’t just a re-creation of reality. Instead, art represents and embodies relationship: the relationship between the painter and subject matter, and it creates a relationship between the painter, the painting, and the person who’s viewing it. Art doesn’t just show the world as it is. It shows the world as it ought to be. In a good painting, the world becomes more than it is; better, brighter, more vivid ... more alive.

And one of the reasons I and so many others love this book is the book itself paints a reality beyond the reality we typically experience. Because, let’s face it, for so many of us, so much of the time, reality is kind of a bummer.

Most of us live our lives as if everything depends on us. We tend to forget about God. As a result, we feel like we need to control everything. And since we can actually control *waaaaay* less than we think we can, we also live with a lot of anxiety.

And this need to be in control, need to be right about everything, and the anxiety that comes along with it results in lives that are anything but bright, vivid, and alive. We naturally fall into ruts and routines. We get up at the same time every morning, eat the same breakfast at the same time, go to the same job or school at the same time, and on and on and on until our heads hit the same pillow at roughly the same time every evening. We tend to live our lives on

autopilot, completing one task only to go on to the next designated task, and then the next, and then the next

Of course, it hasn't always been that way. As y'all know, my granddaughter Hazel is now about a month old. Before we know it, she'll be crawling around, then toddling around, getting into stuff. Her experience of life will be very different than yours and mine. Everything will be new and different ... bright ... vivid ... alive; full of newness and potential. That's how it is with kids.

But then we grow up. We get into our routines. We get settled in our ways of looking at the world and each other. We typically progress from the vivid, vibrant, new, and exciting kind of life of our youth to the routine, settled, predictable, and in-control kind of life of "responsible adults."

But when we look at the life of Paul, the author of today's scripture, we actually see him doing the exact opposite.

When we're first introduced to him near the beginning of the book of Acts, his name is Saul. He's a guy who is very in control of his life, and wants to be in control of everything else. He was an up and coming Pharisee, an expert in Jewish law; extremely zealous in his adherence to that law, and very outspoken in requiring others to adhere to it as well. In fact, the first time we encounter him in the Bible, he's actually holding the coats of the religious leaders who are stoning Stephen, because he's preaching about a new kind of life in Jesus.

The next time we encounter Saul, he's on his way to Damascus to arrest and imprison as many Jesus followers as he can find; again, because they're claiming there's an exciting, vibrant,

vivid, new kind of life to be found in Jesus. For Saul, life and everything associated with it was black and white. He was very confident that he was right and everyone who disagreed with him was wrong. He was in complete control of his life. Sure, he was also angry and vindictive, but that's just part of the deal, right?

But then, on the road to Damascus, something he could never have predicted happened.

A few weeks ago, we talked about some women who encountered Jesus. He healed them, gave them new life. And as a result, their lives were never the same. Well, the same thing happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. He encountered Jesus is a bright light that literally threw him to the ground. Initially, he was blinded. But three days later, the scales fell off his eyes and he was reborn into a new life as Paul; a brighter, more vivid, more alive life.

And the process of that rebirth and new life is what Paul is describing in today's scripture. This is a letter he wrote to the Corinthian church. Now, we've talked about the Corinthians before. Paul started that church. They had a special place in his heart. But they also had some problems. They were constantly struggling against the relentless pull to conform to the pagan, self-glorifying culture around them; to give in to the grey, dull, routine, the need to be right and in control, that accompanied making life all about themselves, rather than the God-oriented, exciting and new life made available by Jesus.

And in this scripture, Paul is making the stakes of that struggle as clear as he possibly can. The difference between allegiance to the culture and apprenticeship to Jesus is, quite simply, life and death.

Now, in saying this, Paul is careful to let them know this isn't some abstract argument. He's been where they are. He states that he himself once saw Christ from a human point of view. He saw Jesus as a troublemaker, a guy who loved upsetting the apple cart, an impractical, idealistic dreamer who sought to entice people away from living in the "real" world."

But Paul goes on to say that he doesn't see Christ that way anymore. Now that he's actually encountered Jesus, he doesn't see the world or anyone in it the same as he did. He explains how this works in v 14: "... because Christ ... has died for all; therefore **all have died.**" In other words, Paul, and everyone else who entrusts themselves to Jesus, have died to their old self-centered, fearful, control-oriented lives. Or, maybe a better way of putting it: those people have woken up to the fact that those old, dull, routine, lives of anxiety and control weren't real life, but a form of death.

And in v. 15, Paul explains the consequence of that kind of living death: "**so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for the one who for their sake died and was raised.**" The nature of the new, vital, abundant life Jesus makes possible through his death is living for Christ, rather than for yourself.

Paul describes this going from dead life to new life as God **reconciling** fallen humanity to Himself—restoring humanity to the relationship of divine love we were created to enjoy. It's what we in the church call justification, or getting right with God. It's when we step across the threshold, into the house of God's divine love. And it happens when we entrust our bodies, minds, souls, and spirits to Jesus.

And when we do that, we are changed. We go from dead to alive. And the catalyst for that change is the Holy Spirit. In this scripture, Paul calls it being “in Christ.” Elsewhere, he calls it “Christ in us.” It’s what happened to Paul somewhere between being struck down on the road to Damascus and the scales falling from his eyes three days later. It’s what happens to us when we step through the door to live in God’s love.

And, as Paul explains to the Corinthians, this new kind of life is just that ... *new*. When we are “in Christ,” there is a new creation, *everything* old has passed away. Everything is new. WE are new. In John’s Gospel, Jesus refers to it as being born again; born into an entirely new kind of life, just like a baby is born into its physical life.

It’s as if, when we entrust ourselves to Christ, he takes all the brokenness, all the ugliness, all the awkwardness and bitterness and anger and sadness, and changes them into something new; something indescribably beautiful. It’s as if we become God’s works of art.

I’m sure some of y’all have seen where people take everyday things—maybe even things people have thrown out—and turn them into beautiful art. It’s called “found art” and it’s kind of like what happens to us when we’re “in Christ.” The old becomes new. The ugly becomes beautiful. The dead becomes alive.

And, some of you may have noticed that our altar looks a little different today. That’s because it’s covered with some new creations. Over the last few weeks, our children have been making some old things new. Just like God took Saul and turned him into Paul, these kids took empty plastic cups and empty toilet paper rolls turned them into these beautiful works of art.

God wants to do the same for each one of us. God wants to do the same for you. Will you let Him?