

Ready for Anything
John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18
January 3, 2021
Rev. Joy Laughridge

I read a meme this week that made me laugh. It said, “Ten years from now, you’ll put on a jacket and find a mask in the pocket. ‘Oh man, what a weird year that was,’ you’ll chuckle to yourself. Then you’ll pick up your machete and continue across the wasteland keeping to the shadows to avoid the roving gangs of cannibal raiders.” As funny as that is, I think after living through last year, a lot of us have experienced a bit of a shift in our thinking. Where we used to maybe say, “anything can happen,” but still expected things to basically progress normally, I think now a lot of us are feeling a bit more cautious and more convinced about the uncertainty that surrounds life and the future. I remember making that mental shift about six or eight months in to last year. When I heard people say, “I can’t wait for 2021 to get here,” I started thinking, “Maybe we don’t want it to. What if it’s actually *worse*?” And if you or other people have started thinking more like this, too, I wonder if our approach to the new year has been a little different than in years past. Usually when people start a new year, they think about setting goals and making resolutions, but I’m wondering if this year, after everything we experienced and lived through in 2020, if instead of making resolutions, people are more interested in making sure that they are equipped to *survive* whatever 2021 might throw at us. With this in mind, I thought it would be fun to take a look at what people say is the must-have survival gear for 2021. I’ll give you a few highlights I found online.

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is

God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John begins by talking about the Word. The concept of the Word, or *logos* in Greek, was a familiar concept for John's audience. For Greeks this was a way of talking about the organizing principle or force behind life and the universe and for Jews it was a way of talking about God's creative acts that touch and influence human life - like when God spoke, and the world was created. For John, the Word is not an impersonal higher power or principle and it is not just a way of talking about God's actions and activities. For John, the Word *is* God in human form. God in flesh, he says, who brings light and life and the power to become God's children. John will unpack what all of this means as he goes on with his story about Jesus in the rest of his Gospel, but we can see already in his introduction that in Jesus, God has come to be near and to help people and it's the kind of help that is even better than the kind a survival kit might provide. It's the kind of help that can carry us into a new year and give us confidence that we can survive whatever may come.

As we look toward the new year, one thing we may fear or be nervous about is potential encounters with the darkness in the world. None of us will completely escape being touched by the darkness because the presence and the power of evil have not yet been completely cast out of this world. As the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6, there is still a war being waged in this world between God and God's people and what he calls "the cosmic powers of this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." We see that ugly power rearing its head in evil human acts and behaviors, as it creates moral and spiritual chaos and confusion, in the pains of the Creation expressed in natural disasters, and in disease and death. We can eat our black-eyed peas for good luck and try our best to avoid pain and suffering - and there's nothing wrong with that - but Jesus gives us something that is more certain.

Do you remember how it felt to be afraid of the dark, and how much better and braver you felt when someone turned the light on? When Jesus came into the world, God turned on the lights for us, and that has the same kind of effect as turning on the lights when you're scared in a dark room. The Light of the World came to chase away all of the darkness and ultimately, he will overcome it completely. That gives us real hope because it means that no matter how the darkness touches our lives, it will never have the last word. Hope is a great thing to have in your survival kit, but Jesus' light is also very practical and helpful, kind of like having a flashlight with you that shines into all of the dark and uncertain places as you move along. He

shines to guide our steps through difficult situations. He shines to teach us wisdom and truth that helps us as we relate to God and to others. He shines to reveal things within ourselves that we need to stop doing because they are causing harm to ourselves or others. The light that Jesus brings to us makes it possible for us to always keep moving forward with courage, and strength, and hope.

Life is a second thing that John says Jesus brings to the world. You may be starting the year feeling a lot of uncertainty and nervousness about life. So many people have experienced losses in this last year that have made living life very difficult, and because of that, you may be starting this year feeling especially anxious about questions surrounding employment, or finances, or your living arrangements, or other things that you fear could disappear leaving you vulnerable and insecure. Uncertainties about how our basic needs will be met are scary, but the truth that Jesus brings life helps us as we face these kinds of questions and uncertainties because the life that Jesus brings encompasses so much more than eating, and breathing, and physical comfort. Now let me be clear before I go on. God does care about our physical needs, and God is active and involved in providing for our needs. Jesus says so in the Sermon on the Mount, but even as he gives assurance that God will take care of us he says, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

The life that Jesus gives *is* more than food and clothes and survival and it's more than a self-serving pursuit of pleasure and comfort. Jesus brings our spirits to life with his life and this results in an inner transformation that changes everything. It awakens us to the knowledge of God and brings our will and our desires into step with God's will and desires. Paul describes this in Galatians as “living by the Spirit” and when we live by the Spirit we don't gratify our sinful desires and do instead what the Spirit desires. It also reorients the focus of our lives from self, back to God and to others which is the orientation people were originally created to have. This change is described in Scripture as becoming a new creation, and as rebirth, and as moving from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. It is what John is talking about in our text when he talks about being born not of blood or of the will of flesh or the will of a man but of God. It happens by faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit and the new life is what Jesus means when he talks about life being more than food and clothing.

It is true that life is usually easier when all of our physical needs are met, and it is more comfortable when we aren't worried about work, and finances, and sickness, but even when all is not as we would like it in our

physical lives, the life that we have through Jesus can't be touched, or minimized, or taken away by circumstances. It is abundant life, it is always rich and full of God's blessings, and it is everlasting. Even if our life in these bodies comes to an end, Jesus's promise is that "those who believe in me, even though they die, will live." This knowledge is what leads the Apostle Paul to say, "I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him..." Or when Jesus told him that his grace was sufficient for Paul in the midst of his hardship, Paul responded saying, "So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." We go into this year trusting God to know our needs and to take care of them, believing that God will, but if God's provision doesn't come when and how we imagined, we can still have the same confidence that Paul had. No matter what, in Christ we possess every spiritual blessing and all we need to live joyful, faithful, meaningful lives.

The final thing that John tells us that the Word brings is the power to become the children of God. It is the gift of acceptance, and belonging, and community that we cannot lose. Everyone is a child of God in the sense that we are all made by God and God loves every person, but when John talks about the power to become children of God, he is talking about a special relationship and a special status that we receive through faith in Christ. It is the opportunity to have a real personal relationship with God in which we are known and loved and cared for. One of the scariest things about facing the unknown can be having to face it alone, and one of the most painful parts of this past year for so many has been the isolation. The thought of that isolation still being a reality in the new year is unsettling. It is true that there may still be more time in which we are separated from people that we love, but in a real way Jesus saves us from total isolation and loneliness, by opening the way for us to have a relationship with God and binding us to God's other children.

Now, if you want to start the year with a well-stocked survival kit, you're either going to have to go to a camping store or do some online shopping because the gear won't magically show up when you need it. On the other hand, you won't have to go shopping for the things that Jesus provides for us to carry into the new year, but if you haven't already received Jesus into your life and all he brings with him, you do need to receive him by putting your faith in him. In John's introduction we see that the Word comes into the world bringing light, and life, and the power to become God's children, but we also see that there are some who did not

accept the Word and the gifts he brought with him. He was in the world and the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him, John says. He came to his own people and they did not accept him, John says, *but* to all who did he gave power to become children of God. From this day forward, for the rest of 2021 and forever, we can go through life equipped not just to survive but to thrive in life no matter what comes our way. Jesus is ready to do the equipping, and all we have to do is let him. Amen.

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accept the Word and the gifts he brought with him. He was in the world and the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him, John says. He came to his own people and they did not accept him, John says, *but* to all who did he gave power to become children of God. From this day forward, for the rest of 2021 and forever, we can go through life equipped not just to survive but to thrive in life no matter what comes our way. Jesus is ready to do the equipping, and all we have to do is let him. Amen.

Ready for Anything
John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18
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I read a meme this week that made me laugh. It said, “Ten years from now, you’ll put on a jacket and find a mask in the pocket. ‘Oh man, what a weird year that was,’ you’ll chuckle to yourself. Then you’ll pick up your machete and continue across the wasteland keeping to the shadows to avoid the roving gangs of cannibal raiders.” As funny as that is, I think after living through last year, a lot of us have experienced a bit of a shift in our thinking. Where we used to maybe say, “anything can happen,” but still expected things to basically progress normally, I think now a lot of us are feeling a bit more cautious and more convinced about the uncertainty that surrounds life and the future. I remember making that mental shift about six or eight months in to last year. When I heard people say, “I can’t wait for 2021 to get here,” I started thinking, “Maybe we don’t want it to. What if it’s actually *worse*?” And if you or other people have started thinking more like this, too, I wonder if our approach to the new year has been a little different than in years past. Usually when people start a new year, they think about setting goals and making resolutions, but I’m wondering if this year, after everything we experienced and lived through in 2020, if instead of making resolutions, people are more interested in making sure that they are equipped to *survive* whatever 2021 might throw at us. With this in mind, I thought it would be fun to take a look at what people say is the must-have survival gear for 2021. I’ll give you a few highlights I found online.

There were a few different sleeping bag/blanket options, but I liked the *Don’t Die in the Woods Emergency Blankets*. They’re waterproof, they reflect up to 90% of your body heat, and they fit into a little zipper bag that you can hold in the palm of your hand. Very useful if you get stuck out in the cold air or pulled in from cold water. My favorite survival tool option is the Lever Gear 40-in-1 Credit Card Multitool. It’s easy to carry, only weighs an ounce, and you can use it to open bottles and fix all kinds of things. For clean water, I liked the Purewell Portable Water Filter Straw. You can fill up your bottle from any water source, attach it to the bottle, and pour through up to 5000 liters of clean drinking water.

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is

God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John begins by talking about the Word. The concept of the Word, or *logos* in Greek, was a familiar concept for John's audience. For Greeks this was a way of talking about the organizing principle or force behind life and the universe and for Jews it was a way of talking about God's creative acts that touch and influence human life - like when God spoke, and the world was created. For John, the Word is not an impersonal higher power or principle and it is not just a way of talking about God's actions and activities. For John, the Word *is* God in human form. God in flesh, he says, who brings light and life and the power to become God's children. John will unpack what all of this means as he goes on with his story about Jesus in the rest of his Gospel, but we can see already in his introduction that in Jesus, God has come to be near and to help people and it's the kind of help that is even better than the kind a survival kit might provide. It's the kind of help that can carry us into a new year and give us confidence that we can survive whatever may come.

As we look toward the new year, one thing we may fear or be nervous about is potential encounters with the darkness in the world. None of us will completely escape being touched by the darkness because the presence and the power of evil have not yet been completely cast out of this world. As the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6, there is still a war being waged in this world between God and God's people and what he calls "the cosmic powers of this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." We see that ugly power rearing its head in evil human acts and behaviors, as it creates moral and spiritual chaos and confusion, in the pains of the Creation expressed in natural disasters, and in disease and death. We can eat our black-eyed peas for good luck and try our best to avoid pain and suffering - and there's nothing wrong with that - but Jesus gives us something that is more certain.

Do you remember how it felt to be afraid of the dark, and how much better and braver you felt when someone turned the light on? When Jesus came into the world, God turned on the lights for us, and that has the same kind of effect as turning on the lights when you're scared in a dark room. The Light of the World came to chase away all of the darkness and ultimately, he will overcome it completely. That gives us real hope because it means that no matter how the darkness touches our lives, it will never have the last word. Hope is a great thing to have in your survival kit, but Jesus' light is also very practical and helpful, kind of like having a flashlight with you that shines into all of the dark and uncertain places as you move along. He

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Life is a second thing that John says Jesus brings to the world. You may be starting the year feeling a lot of uncertainty and nervousness about life. So many people have experienced losses in this last year that have made living life very difficult, and because of that, you may be starting this year feeling especially anxious about questions surrounding employment, or finances, or your living arrangements, or other things that you fear could disappear leaving you vulnerable and insecure. Uncertainties about how our basic needs will be met are scary, but the truth that Jesus brings life helps us as we face these kinds of questions and uncertainties because the life that Jesus brings encompasses so much more than eating, and breathing, and physical comfort. Now let me be clear before I go on. God does care about our physical needs, and God is active and involved in providing for our needs. Jesus says so in the Sermon on the Mount, but even as he gives assurance that God will take care of us he says, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

The life that Jesus gives *is* more than food and clothes and survival and it's more than a self-serving pursuit of pleasure and comfort. Jesus brings our spirits to life with his life and this results in an inner transformation that changes everything. It awakens us to the knowledge of God and brings our will and our desires into step with God's will and desires. Paul describes this in Galatians as “living by the Spirit” and when we live by the Spirit we don't gratify our sinful desires and do instead what the Spirit desires. It also reorients the focus of our lives from self, back to God and to others which is the orientation people were originally created to have. This change is described in Scripture as becoming a new creation, and as rebirth, and as moving from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. It is what John is talking about in our text when he talks about being born not of blood or of the will of flesh or the will of a man but of God. It happens by faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit and the new life is what Jesus means when he talks about life being more than food and clothing.

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The life that Jesus gives *is* more than food and clothes and survival and it's more than a self-serving pursuit of pleasure and comfort. Jesus brings our spirits to life with his life and this results in an inner transformation that changes everything. It awakens us to the knowledge of God and brings our will and our desires into step with God's will and desires. Paul describes this in Galatians as “living by the Spirit” and when we live by the Spirit we don't gratify our sinful desires and do instead what the Spirit desires. It also reorients the focus of our lives from self, back to God and to others which is the orientation people were originally created to have. This change is described in Scripture as becoming a new creation, and as rebirth, and as moving from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. It is what John is talking about in our text when he talks about being born not of blood or of the will of flesh or the will of a man but of God. It happens by faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit and the new life is what Jesus means when he talks about life being more than food and clothing.

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accept the Word and the gifts he brought with him. He was in the world and the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him, John says. He came to his own people and they did not accept him, John says, *but* to all who did he gave power to become children of God. From this day forward, for the rest of 2021 and forever, we can go through life equipped not just to survive but to thrive in life no matter what comes our way. Jesus is ready to do the equipping, and all we have to do is let him. Amen.

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The text this morning comes from the Gospel of John. It is basically John's telling of the Christmas story and he tells the story very differently from the way the other Gospel writers do. In John's telling, there are no shepherds, or angels, or wise men. Mary and Joseph aren't even mentioned. Instead, John's account is more spiritual in nature and is concerned with describing Jesus's divine origin and nature and the purpose of his birth. Let's listen to the Scripture from John 1.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is

God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John begins by talking about the Word. The concept of the Word, or *logos* in Greek, was a familiar concept for John's audience. For Greeks this was a way of talking about the organizing principle or force behind life and the universe and for Jews it was a way of talking about God's creative acts that touch and influence human life - like when God spoke, and the world was created. For John, the Word is not an impersonal higher power or principle and it is not just a way of talking about God's actions and activities. For John, the Word *is* God in human form. God in flesh, he says, who brings light and life and the power to become God's children. John will unpack what all of this means as he goes on with his story about Jesus in the rest of his Gospel, but we can see already in his introduction that in Jesus, God has come to be near and to help people and it's the kind of help that is even better than the kind a survival kit might provide. It's the kind of help that can carry us into a new year and give us confidence that we can survive whatever may come.

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The text this morning comes from the Gospel of John. It is basically John's telling of the Christmas story and he tells the story very differently from the way the other Gospel writers do. In John's telling, there are no shepherds, or angels, or wise men. Mary and Joseph aren't even mentioned. Instead, John's account is more spiritual in nature and is concerned with describing Jesus's divine origin and nature and the purpose of his birth. Let's listen to the Scripture from John 1.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is

God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John begins by talking about the Word. The concept of the Word, or *logos* in Greek, was a familiar concept for John's audience. For Greeks this was a way of talking about the organizing principle or force behind life and the universe and for Jews it was a way of talking about God's creative acts that touch and influence human life - like when God spoke, and the world was created. For John, the Word is not an impersonal higher power or principle and it is not just a way of talking about God's actions and activities. For John, the Word *is* God in human form. God in flesh, he says, who brings light and life and the power to become God's children. John will unpack what all of this means as he goes on with his story about Jesus in the rest of his Gospel, but we can see already in his introduction that in Jesus, God has come to be near and to help people and it's the kind of help that is even better than the kind a survival kit might provide. It's the kind of help that can carry us into a new year and give us confidence that we can survive whatever may come.

As we look toward the new year, one thing we may fear or be nervous about is potential encounters with the darkness in the world. None of us will completely escape being touched by the darkness because the presence and the power of evil have not yet been completely cast out of this world. As the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6, there is still a war being waged in this world between God and God's people and what he calls "the cosmic powers of this present darkness and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." We see that ugly power rearing its head in evil human acts and behaviors, as it creates moral and spiritual chaos and confusion, in the pains of the Creation expressed in natural disasters, and in disease and death. We can eat our black-eyed peas for good luck and try our best to avoid pain and suffering - and there's nothing wrong with that - but Jesus gives us something that is more certain.

Do you remember how it felt to be afraid of the dark, and how much better and braver you felt when someone turned the light on? When Jesus came into the world, God turned on the lights for us, and that has the same kind of effect as turning on the lights when you're scared in a dark room. The Light of the World came to chase away all of the darkness and ultimately, he will overcome it completely. That gives us real hope because it means that no matter how the darkness touches our lives, it will never have the last word. Hope is a great thing to have in your survival kit, but Jesus' light is also very practical and helpful, kind of like having a flashlight with you that shines into all of the dark and uncertain places as you move along. He

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Life is a second thing that John says Jesus brings to the world. You may be starting the year feeling a lot of uncertainty and nervousness about life. So many people have experienced losses in this last year that have made living life very difficult, and because of that, you may be starting this year feeling especially anxious about questions surrounding employment, or finances, or your living arrangements, or other things that you fear could disappear leaving you vulnerable and insecure. Uncertainties about how our basic needs will be met are scary, but the truth that Jesus brings life helps us as we face these kinds of questions and uncertainties because the life that Jesus brings encompasses so much more than eating, and breathing, and physical comfort. Now let me be clear before I go on. God does care about our physical needs, and God is active and involved in providing for our needs. Jesus says so in the Sermon on the Mount, but even as he gives assurance that God will take care of us he says, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

The life that Jesus gives *is* more than food and clothes and survival and it's more than a self-serving pursuit of pleasure and comfort. Jesus brings our spirits to life with his life and this results in an inner transformation that changes everything. It awakens us to the knowledge of God and brings our will and our desires into step with God's will and desires. Paul describes this in Galatians as “living by the Spirit” and when we live by the Spirit we don't gratify our sinful desires and do instead what the Spirit desires. It also reorients the focus of our lives from self, back to God and to others which is the orientation people were originally created to have. This change is described in Scripture as becoming a new creation, and as rebirth, and as moving from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. It is what John is talking about in our text when he talks about being born not of blood or of the will of flesh or the will of a man but of God. It happens by faith and through the power of the Holy Spirit and the new life is what Jesus means when he talks about life being more than food and clothing.

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