

Barry Shafer's Free Youth Devotional: 'Before and After Christ'

The Backdrop

Shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection, the gospel message spread like wildfire throughout the Roman world. The churches that sprang up as a result of this growth began to experience, as you can imagine, some growing pains. One of these growing pains was due to confusion about what it meant to "accept the Good News that Jesus is the Christ." Enter the apostle Paul, God's man to explain the deal. Much of the New Testament is a collection of letters—including the Book of Ephesians, which we're peeking into here—from Paul to new believers to encourage them in their new faith.

The What

Print the passage below. With a pen or colored pencil, mark every reference to the recipients of this letter (look for words such as *you* and *your*) in this way:

- draw a smiley face over anything that describes life after Christ.
- draw a frowney face over anything that describes life before Christ.

After you've marked the passage, look at your smileys and frowneys and make two lists that describe life before Christ and life after Christ.

The Word

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:1-10).

The So What

Which of these two lists are closer to your life situation?

Spend a couple minutes prayerfully pondering the after-Christ info, then process/journal your thoughts to these questions:

If you are a believer and living in the *after*, how well does your lifestyle reflect the promises you have in Christ?

Of all the great things in the *after*, which does your heart need a major dose of right now?

Focus on verse 10 for a minute. How can the promises in that verse give you hope for any hard things you might be facing right now?

One more thing: Look again at the passage and write down everything God has done or is doing for you. Then, if you'd like to make the move from before to after, pray to God right now: Acknowledge your separated life before Christ (Rom. 3:23-24; Eph. 2), and accept what God has done for you (John 3:16; 1 John 1:7-9). Then, tell someone about your move.