
NOW & THEN

Lesson 1



The Future Started Early

Primary Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:20–23 (NLT)

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to help you live faithfully between what Christ has already done and what He is still bringing to completion.

1. The Problem We Experience

Many people assume that if God is real and active, life should begin to noticeably improve. We expect clarity, resolution, and visible change. When that does not happen, we often conclude that something is wrong—either with our faith or with God’s faithfulness. But Scripture does not describe the Christian life as immediate resolution. It describes it as a life lived between what God has already done and what He is still bringing to completion. The confusion we feel is not because something is broken in our faith, but because we misunderstand what God has actually promised for this present time. The tension we experience is not accidental—it is the environment in which faith is formed.

We believe:

- Jesus rose from the dead
- Sin and death have been defeated
- God is at work

And yet:

- Prayers remain unanswered
- Pain does not disappear
- Life does not suddenly resolve

Scripture does not ignore this tension.
It explains it.

2. The Beginning, Not the End (1 Corinthians 15:20–23)

The Apostle Paul describes the resurrection of Jesus as the “firstfruits,” a term rooted in agriculture. Firstfruits were the first portion of a harvest that appeared before the rest of the crop. They were not the full harvest, but they were undeniable evidence that the harvest had begun and would continue. By using this term, Paul is making a precise claim: the resurrection is not the completion of God’s work—it is the beginning of a new creation. This means that something decisive has already happened, even though its full effects are not yet visible. Many of our frustrations come from



expecting the harvest when God has only promised the firstfruits. When we expect completion instead of continuation, we misinterpret our experience.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:20–23

Key Truths:

- The resurrection is the beginning of God’s new creation
 - It guarantees what is coming
 - It does not complete what has been started
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Reflection

Where have you expected God to bring completion when He has only promised that something has begun?

3. The World We Actually Live In (Romans 8:18–25)

Scripture describes the present world not as restored, but as being renewed. In Romans 8, Paul uses the word “groaning” to describe both creation and believers. This is not language of failure—it is language of process. Groaning reflects a condition where something is incomplete but moving toward fulfillment. It means that pain, delay, and tension are not signs that God is absent, but evidence that His work is not yet finished. Many believers assume that struggle indicates something is wrong with their faith. Scripture teaches the opposite: struggle is a normal part of living in a world that has been changed by resurrection but not yet fully restored. Misunderstanding this leads people to doubt God when they should be learning to trust Him.

Read: Romans 8:18–25

Key Truths:

- The world is not fully restored
 - Believers still experience tension and struggle
 - God’s work is active, even when incomplete
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Reflection

Where have you misinterpreted delay or struggle as God’s absence instead of recognizing it as part of His ongoing work?



4. How Jesus Meets Us in the Tension (John 11:1–44)

John 11 shows us how Jesus operates within a world that is not yet fully restored. When Lazarus becomes sick, Jesus does not immediately respond. He delays, and Lazarus dies. When Jesus arrives, He does not begin with explanation—He enters into the grief of those who are mourning. He weeps, even though He knows He will raise Lazarus from the dead. This reveals something essential: God’s presence is not dependent on immediate outcomes. He is fully present in the middle of unresolved situations. Many people look for God only in resolution, but Scripture shows that He is equally present in the process. If we only recognize God when circumstances change, we will miss Him in the very places He is most active.

Read: John 11:1–44

Key Truths:

- Jesus does not always act immediately
- God is present before circumstances change
- Delay does not mean absence

Reflection

Where are you equating God’s presence with visible results instead of recognizing His presence in the process?

5. Living Between Two Realities

The Bible teaches that two realities exist at the same time. Something has already been secured through Jesus, and yet the full experience of that reality has not yet arrived. We tend to think in either/or categories—either something is finished or it is not. Scripture presents a both/and reality. God has already accomplished what He promised, but we are still living in the unfolding of that promise. This means that faith is not denying what is unfinished, nor is it ignoring what is already true. Faith is learning to live in both realities at the same time without collapsing one into the other. When we lose one side of this tension, we either become discouraged or disconnected from reality.

NOW (Already True)

- Christ has been raised



- Death has been defeated
- You have been made new
- God’s Kingdom has begun

THEN (Not Yet Complete)

- The world is not fully restored
- Suffering still exists
- Your transformation is ongoing
- God’s work is not yet finished

Reflection

Which reality do you tend to minimize—what God has already done, or what He has not yet completed?

6. Why This Feels Disorienting

Most people assume that if something is true, it should immediately be experienced. This assumption shapes how we interpret our faith. When reality does not match expectation, we often question God’s faithfulness. But Scripture teaches that what God secures and what we experience do not always occur at the same time. What God has accomplished is certain, but our experience of it unfolds over time. This gap creates tension, and that tension can feel disorienting. However, the problem is not God’s timing—it is our expectation of immediacy. When we expect completion where God has promised process, we misread both our lives and His work.

Reflection

Where are your expectations of immediacy shaping your frustration with God?

7. Formation Practice (This Week)



Practice: Learn to Hold Both Realities

Each day this week, practice this intentionally:

Step 1 — Name What Is Unfinished

Be specific. Do not generalize.

Step 2 — Name What Is Already True

Use Scripture, not emotion, to answer this.

Step 3 — Hold Both Without Resolving the Tension

Do not try to fix it.

Do not explain it away.

Do not ignore it.

Instead, remain present in both.

Daily Prayer

Lord,

Help me trust what You have already secured,
even when I cannot yet see it completed.

Teach me to live faithfully in the tension
without trying to escape it.

Amen.

8. Living It Out

Choose one specific area of your life that feels unresolved.

Write it down:

Now write what is already true about this situation based on Scripture:

Each day this week:

- Return to this same situation



- Write both realities again
- Refuse to move on until both are clearly named

Faith is not waiting for resolution.

It is learning to live in what God has already begun.

Final Note

You are not living after everything is finished.

You are living after the beginning.

The future has already started—
and you are living in it now.

