

Introduction: Elevator Pitch

A pastor and a priest step into an elevator. I was the pastor; the priest was a new friend I'd made at a conference. We'd been jovially debating theology for a few hours in the conference hotel restaurant, my friends and I in our jeans and T-shirts, and him in his sturdy white collar and crisp black shirt, ever the priest even at last call at the hotel bar. As we stepped onto the elevator, I mentioned that I was writing a book about original blessing. Surprised, he asked, "Wait, so you don't believe in original sin?" I laughed. "No, I definitely do not."

His eyebrows raised incredulously as he said, in all seriousness, "Then why do we need Jesus?"

I get it. We've been told over and over again that we need Jesus because of our sin. We don't even question whether this is the best or most genuine description of the gospel anymore. We've heard it so many times we accept it without thinking.

You've heard of an elevator pitch, where in twenty to thirty seconds you compellingly describe and spark interest about someone or something. Eventually, your elevator pitch becomes what you're known for. It becomes your identity,

your reputation. If you ask a stranger on the street what Christians believe, you'll hear an answer that doesn't just include sin but considers sin the headline.

Sin plays a starring role in Christianity's elevator pitch.

But it shouldn't.

It makes following Jesus sound like the sin version of tax evasion. It makes faith the sum total of a get-out-of-hell-free card. And worst of all, it frames the gospel as a story of separation.

There's a well-worn description of the great chasm of sin, where we're on one side and God is on the other, and Jesus' cross provides a bridge over which we can walk to God again. That illustration isn't a description of the gospel. It's a description of the story of original sin. And original sin is not the gospel.

The gospel is not a story of us being separated by sin from God. It's the story of a God who is so faithfully *for* us and intent on being *with* us that God became human to help us embody the wholeness and fullness of life we've been made for. It's not a story of separation. It's a story of invitation and participation.

At some point along the way, we Christians took a wrong turn; that turn is the doctrine of original sin. For about 1500 years now, we've kept going, doubling down on the fork we took in the road. And rather than turning back or getting directions or even deciding that we'd traveled far enough, we just kept going. Original sin took us down the wrong path. It took us into a version of the gospel where sin is the

headline and separation is the norm. We are long overdue for a turnaround.

That turnaround is *original blessing*. Far more than just being made in God's image, original blessing claims we are steadfastly held in relationship with God. Original blessing reminds us that God calls us *good* and *beloved* before we are anything else. Sin is not at the heart of our nature; blessing is. And that didn't stop being true because Adam and Eve ate fruit in the garden. In fact, it has never stopped being true.

Original sin tells us there is a chasm of separation between humanity and God. And this chasm isn't just some cosmic reality; it exists within our own nature. When you think about it that way, a bridge hardly seems sufficient. We might be able to walk across the bridge and stand next to God, but the sin nature that supposedly separates us from God is coming right along with us. If our human nature separates us from God, we need more than a bridge. We need to be disembodied, which is a weird place to end up in a faith that's based on God becoming human.

When we claim a sin nature, we depart the green pastures and still waters of blessing for the dry desert chasm of separation. We forfeit walking with our shepherd, and walk across his back to get our salvation ticket validated instead. But Jesus doesn't want us to walk across him. He wants us to walk with him.

The gospel is not a solution to our sin problem. It's an invitation to participate in the blessing and life of God. And that is fantastic news. It's headline news. It's a compelling elevator pitch.

Original blessing is one of the most beautiful gifts Christianity has to offer the world. While there's nothing original about sin, original blessing is truly revolutionary. In a world too often bent on retribution, original blessing is the healing balm of God's faithful and unending love.

We may be steeped in years of a bad elevator pitch, but that doesn't mean we can't change it. My Lebanese grandmother knits, and she can intertwine colors and patterns to make a beautiful blanket without even looking down at her hands. She's had a lot of practice, but sometimes she misses. I called her one day and she answered the phone all in a huff. I asked her what was wrong and she said she had spent a few hours knitting a blanket, only to realize she had gotten off her line and the pattern was just crooked the whole way down after that. "What did you do?" I asked. "Honey!" she said in her thick accent. "There's only one thing I could do. I had to unstitch it all the way back to there and start over again."

It can be scary and frustrating and disheartening to realize that we need to rethink much of what we thought we had figured out, but turning around is a central aspect of the Christian faith. It's called repentance. Rather than continuing to walk down the wrong road, rather than settling for a crooked blanket or a bad elevator pitch, rather than feeling resigned to a story of our life with God that's couched in separation, we can choose to turn toward a life grounded in blessing. That turn changes our entire journey. It's amazing what transformation can happen when we see the world through the lens of blessing.

The biggest, most revolutionary, most important gift God

has ever given us is blessing. Without blessing, we would not exist. Without blessing, we wouldn't know grace, or mercy, or forgiveness. Without blessing there is no steadfast love, no covenant, no Jesus, no Spirit, no kingdom of God. The universe may have started with a big bang, but our relationship with God started with blessing.

And it's time we tell that beautiful story.