

# SABR

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF FOLLOWING JESUS**

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# WELCOME

Welcome! If you are reading this, chances are you just accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and want to see your life change, or you want to help someone else change their life too. **That's what this book is all about.**

*Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17)*

The quick and simple of it is: are you following Jesus? Are you helping others follow Jesus? We will help you do that with this book in your hands. We will introduce you to God's Word and His life-changing ways, the big story of Scripture, and the basics of our faith. But most of all we want to invite you to join Jesus in changing your family, neighbors, and our world. **Start following Jesus. Start sharing Jesus. And watch the world change!**

— *PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

# CONTENTS

## START . . . PG. 8

<b>INTRODUCTION:</b> Starting a New Life . . .	11
<b>CHAPTER 1:</b> Salvation . . .	13
<b>CHAPTER 2:</b> Secured and Assured . . .	21
<b>CHAPTER 3:</b> Baptism . . .	31
<b>CHAPTER 4:</b> The Church . . .	39

## FOLLOW . . . PG. 52

<b>CHAPTER 5:</b> Scripture . . .	55
<b>CHAPTER 6:</b> Prayer . . .	63
<b>CHAPTER 7:</b> Worship . . .	75
<b>CHAPTER 8:</b> Community . . .	83
<b>CHAPTER 9:</b> Serving . . .	95
<b>CHAPTER 10:</b> Sharing . . .	105

## MORE . . . PG. 114

The Story of Scripture . . .	117
How to Study . . .	125
Theology Basics . . .	129

**start**





# INTRODUCTION

## *Starting a New Life*

### **STARTING IS IMPORTANT**

If you want to experience the world and the richness of life, you must start the journey by leaving your house. If you want to grow a career or lead a business, you must start the climb by achieving a degree. If you want to accomplish a fitness goal, you must start by signing up for a gym membership.

Nothing desired becomes reality without the right start. Similarly, if you are not “born again” into God’s family through Jesus Christ (John 3:3), you cannot expect to experience true life or start to grow as a Christian. If you do not come to Jesus to begin with, you cannot follow Him and lead a life blessed by Him.

That may sound simple, but many people attend a church or participate in religious activity without ever starting a new life with Jesus. Starting is important.

## STARTING RIGHT IS IMPORTANT

That is why we start this study by looking at your very first steps with God. To follow Jesus, you must begin here. To know God and His family, you must start at the very first step: **salvation**.

Building from this essential starting point, we will then progress to the key steps laid out in **assurance, baptism, and church**.

As we take this journey, you will notice at the end of each chapter that we invite you to review, discuss, apply, and pray. This is best done by, first, asking the Lord to guide you in prayer and, second, through a conversation with a mentor. Find someone who is a little further along in their journey of following Jesus and ask them to help you walk through these steps before you move onto the next chapter. It will help you understand, process, and live out what you learn as you continue this journey of following Jesus.

If you recently accepted Jesus as Savior, then you must begin to read God's Word right away! To grow in Him, to build your faith, and to learn about your new life, start reading today. Simply open a Bible, look for John in the Table of Contents, and read one chapter each day. In the next 21 days, you will start a new habit, and what is more, you will start living your new life victoriously in Christ Jesus.



# SALVATION

## *God's Rescue Story*

Welcome to God's family! If you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then He rescued you from sin and death and has made you a part of His family. Before we move forward with learning how to follow Jesus, let's review what God has done in your life - the miracle of salvation and God's rescue story.

### **So why did you need rescued anyway?**

Open your Bible to the book of Genesis, the very first book in the Old Testament. You can read the full passages later, but for now just look at **Genesis 1:26-31** in your Bible. In the beginning, God created everything, including humans. This passage tells us that God created us in His image, and we were a good creation. We were made to walk in relationship with our Creator God.

Now look at **Genesis 3**. A villain enters the story, and a virus enters the good creation. Satan, in the form of a snake, tricks and tempts Eve to disobey God. Then her husband, Adam, also disobeys God. Adam and Eve rebel against God, the universe's King. And so, the world is broken, infected like a computer that is attacked by a virus. Humanity suffers physical



and spiritual death, separated from God forever. Romans 6:23a says it this way:

*“For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23a)*

Just like the work at our job earns us a wage, our sin earns the wage of death. **But hope arises even amid judgment as God promises in Genesis 3:15 to rescue humanity by providing a Savior. The rest of the Bible is about that story and about that Savior.**

Fast-forward several thousand years and look at the events in **Luke 1**, the third book in the New Testament. At the height of the Roman Empire, a young Jewish girl is approached by an angel and told she will give birth, as a virgin, to the Savior promised in Genesis 3. The girl, Mary, will birth the Savior, Jesus, the Son of God Himself. In the next chapter, **Luke 2**, she and her husband journey to Bethlehem for a tax registration. While there, prophecy and promises are fulfilled, and Jesus Christ is born.

The next 30 years of Jesus' life are a quiet mystery. He grows up in an uneventful way, but when He reaches manhood, He begins the ministry of his Father. He tells people to repent and turn to God, He cares for people, heals them, and teaches them about God's kingdom. His teaching runs against the religious leaders of that day, and they arrest and condemn Him because of their jealousy.

They decide to kill Jesus. But this is no ordinary murder plot, nor some accidental martyrdom. Jesus willingly sacrifices His life. He is crucified on a cross and buried in a tomb. His enemies thought that would be the end of the story.

But remember, this is God's story! Turn to **Luke 24** in your Bible. Jesus Christ comes back to life three days after He suffers and dies on the cross. In his resurrected body, Christ invites

His followers to believe what He just did and to go tell others about His gift of salvation.

### **That is the story, but what is God's plan to rescue us? How do we get salvation?**

Because Jesus is God's Son, He is perfect. Because He is perfect, He and only He could offer His life as a substitute for yours. The Bible says,

*“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”  
(2 Corinthians 5:21)*

By dying on the cross, Jesus paid the wage of death that your sin rightfully earned you. By rising again, Jesus forever defeated death and sin and brings you and all those who receive him new life – a life that begins the moment you receive Jesus as your Savior and continues forever with Him in eternity. Jesus said,

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24)*

### **So, what do we need to know and believe to receive this new life?**

**God loves you!** He is your Creator and wants to have a relationship with you and all people (Genesis 1:1). He wants to share His abundant life with you (John 3:16; 10:10).

**You are a sinner.** And not just you, but every human who ever lived (Romans 3:10). A sinner is a rebel against God's standard, holiness, and authority (Romans 3:23), just like Adam and Eve.

**The penalty for sin is death.** Rebellion must be dealt with, and sin has a price that must be paid (Romans 5:12). Sin causes us to have eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). Sin causes physical death in this life (Genesis 2:16-17) and spiritual death and eternal separation in a real place known as hell (Revelation 21:8).

**Jesus paid your sin penalty with His own death.** Jesus is God's Son, and the only righteous person who could ever do this (1 Peter 3:18; Acts 4:12). He lived perfectly, died, was buried, and then resurrected in His own power (1 Corinthians 15). His death was your substitute, and He took your punishment so that God's wrath could be satisfied (Romans 5:8).

**His salvation can come to you by His grace, not your works.** He can save you, rescue you from Satan, cure you of your sin, and help you escape from sin's penalty (Romans 10:13). He offers this as a free gift of His grace or "unmerited favor" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**You must repent and call on God by faith.** To repent is more than regret (acknowledge sin mentally) and more than remorse (acknowledge sin emotionally). To repent means you turn away from your rebellion and turn toward God—it is a literal act of your will. You then put your full trust in Jesus and believe God for salvation (Romans 5:1). You express this by literally asking Jesus to forgive your sin (Romans 10:9).

That is God's plan. You once were dead in sin, but now and forever, you are alive in Christ!

### **Is this your story?**

Is this the story you have heard and believed? Have you asked God to rescue you? If you have never done this, now is the best time to make sure about your standing with God and your

eternal life. **Pray, talk to God right now, in your own words, from your heart.** You could say something like this:

*“God, I believe that You love me. I confess that I am a sinner, and I know the penalty for sin is death. I believe that Jesus paid my sin penalty with His own death on the cross, and that He rose again. I believe that salvation comes by Your grace, not by any good works that I can perform. I repent and by faith ask You right now for salvation. Save me and be Lord of my life. Thank You.”*

If you prayed that prayer and trusted in Jesus for salvation, congratulations! That is the greatest decision we could ever make because it impacts not only our lives here on earth but our eternity! Be sure to share your decision with a friend, family member or mentor so that they can celebrate with you and guide you in your next step in following Jesus.

## REVIEW

- What are some key takeaways from this chapter?

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- Do you have any questions about the six short truths demonstrated at the end of this chapter? Are there any truths that you are still trying to understand?

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## DISCUSS

- How would you describe God's rescue story?

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- Why does sin separate us from God?

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- What are some ways we can tell the world is broken by sin? What are some ways we can tell that we are broken by sin?

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- How did Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection make a way for us to draw near to God again?

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## APPLY

- When did you first understand God's plan and receive Jesus as your Savior? If not, what holds you back from experiencing the miracle of salvation and accepting Jesus as your Savior?

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- Memorize Romans 10:9: *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*
- Learn the six short truths of God's plan.
- Begin to write down the names of people YOU know who are not saved. Pray for them daily and pray that God will open up a door to share the six short truths of His plan with them.

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## SECURED AND ASSURED

### *Confident in Your Salvation*

Let's pretend you have bought your first house. You have moved in and unpacked. At first, your nights are peaceful, but you begin to have a hard time sleeping. Your mind drifts to worry, *"That closing went quick. Did I make the right decision? There was so much to sign. Did I sign everything? Did I even understand it? Did the check go through? What if I missed something and this house isn't even mine? I probably shouldn't have this house; I don't know how anything works in it!"* And then, even worse, you start hearing noises in the night: *"Did I lock the front door? Does a security company monitor this house? Maybe someone is breaking in! Maybe the former owners are coming to take the house back because I didn't sign all those papers!"* Maybe you need a vacation!

Like the stress of buying a new house, some people stress over their new salvation. They may worry within a short time of their "spiritual birthday," or the fears and doubts may come years later. They worry they somehow did it wrong, or that



if they are not good enough, God will foreclose on them and repossess their salvation.

### **Does it matter if you have assurance and security?**

Yes! Satan will discourage and defeat you throughout life if you constantly doubt that God saved you. So, let's tackle these doubts and questions.

### **Am I secure in my salvation?**

The great news is that your “spiritual house” is locked up tight. Scripture teaches that salvation is a permanent contract. No matter how you feel or what you do—or what anyone else does to you—you will not lose your salvation. This is not because you are good enough, but because God is all-powerful and loving. He promised to maintain your salvation. You do not need to make payments; He already made the payment through Jesus Christ!

That means that you do not have to constantly worry about losing your salvation; instead, you can rest in the assurance that Jesus already paid the price for your sins. Scripture assures us that once we are saved, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

### **But how do I know I am secure in God?**

Let's look at the evidence of examples and teaching in Scripture.

## **EXAMPLES IN SCRIPTURE**

The Apostle Paul established a church in Corinth, a city known for its immorality and idolatry. When Paul learned that many new Christians returned to their past sinful ways, he wrote the letters of **1 & 2 Corinthians**. His aim was to rebuke, discipline, and remind them of how they should live. Despite their failings, he addressed them as part of God's family, emphasizing their enduring security in it. Similarly, the **Ephesian** church

initially displayed great love for God but later drifted away. In **Revelation 1-3**, Christ rebuked them for losing that first love. Christ also corrected the lukewarm Laodicean church, to demonstrate how He guides and corrects His family members without disowning them for their sins.

## TEACHING IN SCRIPTURE

**The Grace of Salvation:** Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:3-6 clearly tell us that we cannot gain salvation by good works. If we could, how would we maintain salvation? Would a bad work ruin our salvation? In 2 Timothy 2:13, Paul explains that even when we are not faithful, God remains faithful because it is who He is. He will not go back on His promises, including keeping us secure in our salvation. This shows how dependable God is, even when we struggle. Knowing that God's faithfulness is not dependent on our performance frees us to live with gratitude and trust in His unfailing love.

**The Assurance of Salvation:** In Scripture, there are no sins that act as deal-breakers for salvation. While God warns His people of the consequences of disobedience, there is not a sin severe enough to cause God to repossess salvation.

**The Promise of Salvation:** In Titus 1:2, Paul writes that God cannot lie. He promised eternal life before time began. This means God's promises are trustworthy and true. His words are dependable and reliable. This reminds us that God's promise to give eternal life is solid and unchanging for those who trust in Him.

**The Permanence of Salvation:** When we became part of God's family through Jesus (John 3:5), we received permanent benefits and rights. These include being cleansed by Jesus' blood (Hebrews 1:3), made perfect (Hebrews 10:14), renewed

in spirit (Titus 3:5), declared innocent (Romans 8:33,34), marked with a seal (Ephesians 4:30), united with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3-4), adopted into God's family (Ephesians 5:29-30), kept safe (Jude 24), and destined for glory (Romans 8:30).

**The Security of Salvation:** God cannot fail in His work to preserve us. The Holy Spirit performs various tasks: making new, sealing, baptizing, indwelling, and interceding (going on our behalf) for us in prayer. Jesus, through His crucifixion and resurrection, continually intercedes on our behalf. Likewise, the Father affirms that His chosen ones will never perish (John 3:16, 10:27-29), thirst (John 4:14), face judgment (1 Corinthians 1:8,9), experience spiritual death (John 8:52), or be forsaken (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 13:5). Jesus affirms this security in John 10:27-30, assuring that His followers listen to Him, and He knows and protects them. He promises they will never be lost and that no one can take this preserving work away from Him. This shows that once we belong to Jesus, we are secure forever.

**Romans 8:31-39** sums this up most powerfully, especially in the last verses:

*“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)*

Salvation is yours, bought by Jesus, given by His Father, and sealed and protected by the Holy Spirit!

## But how do I know I am actually saved in the first place?

First, read 1 John 5:13:

*“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)*

Our doubts often arise from two sources: the convicting work of the Holy Spirit or the distracting tactics of Satan. When it is the enemy at work, he often tries to divert our attention from God’s truth by reminding us of our past mistakes or current shortcomings. These distractions can make us doubt our worthiness of God’s love and forgiveness and lead us away from the confidence we have in Christ. However, it is essential to recognize these tactics for what they are and to combat them with the truth of God’s Word and the reassurance of His unflinching love and grace.

What are some doubts that distract you from walking in confidence of your salvation? These may include:

**“I cannot remember the events surrounding my conversion.”**

People who accept Christ in their childhood may struggle with this because memory fails. Not knowing the exact moment of your salvation is not crucial, but do you remember an age or stage you came into relationship with God?

**“I did not see a radical change.”** It is not how much external sin you see eliminated from your life; it is the change that happens inside. Many people live good, wholesome lives, but they are dead inside. Do not base your assurance solely on external changes that you can see.

**“I just keep sinning.”** Read Romans 7; even Paul, the great Christian, confessed his sin struggles. The truth is we are all still in a battle, still living in this flesh and in a broken world. We will have struggles. We will see more victory, and we should grow stronger over time, but we will always still deal with sin on this earth. As we do, it is important to recognize that the Holy Spirit brings us to repent to truth, while Satan accuses, tempts, and deceives.

**“I think I did it wrong.”** Maybe they were the wrong words, or they were the wrong counselor! Relax. There is no magic formula quoted in Scripture. People came to Jesus in different ways, using many different words.

**1 John** was written to give us confidence in the face of doubt and to help us confront these fears. As **1 John** shows, true Christians have these marks in their life:

- **God:** They want to know Him (1:3,4), look forward to seeing Him (3:2,3), and relate to Him by His Spirit within them (4:13).
- **Sin:** They are convicted of their sin (1:5-10), despise their sin (2:15), and fall to sin less and less (3:5,6).
- **Saints:** They seek fellowship with other Christians (1:3,4; 3:14).
- **Prayer:** They see prayer work through God answering their prayers (3:22, 5:14,15).
- **Scripture:** They believe in Scripture (5:1-2), know what Scripture is not (4:1-3), and want to obey Scripture (2:3-5).

If you seek assurance in your salvation, start here: Have you asked Christ for salvation? (If not, re-read the Salvation chapter that came before this.) If you asked Christ for salvation, what

does Scripture promise He would do if you asked? Also, consider whether there are present or past sins that distract you. Acknowledge and confess them, but do not choose to dwell on them. Ask God to give you assurance, and then go on living!

It is integral to understand the permanence of our salvation. It transforms our hearts and lives. No longer do we have to worry about our own security, but can focus on carrying the Gospel message to those who do not know Jesus. Our internal assurance fuels external service, enabling us to live out the message we have professed. Now that you know your security in salvation, allow it to lead to change in your heart and life!

## REVIEW

- What are some key takeaways from this chapter?

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- Do you have any questions about your security of salvation?

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## DISCUSS

- Have you ever experienced doubts regarding your faith or salvation? How did you handle them?

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- Can you identify any past experiences when Satan's distractions affected your confidence in your relationship with God?

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- Think about your ongoing struggles with sin. How do these challenges affect your faith, and how do you view your spiritual growth in light of them?

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## APPLY

- Personal Reflection: How can you proactively handle moments of doubt in your faith, and what specific steps can you take to turn to Scripture as a source of assurance and guidance?

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- Scripture Integration: Reflect on the importance of combatting doubt with Scripture, what passages resonate with you as anchors for your faith, and how can you intentionally incorporate these verses into your daily life to strengthen your spiritual foundation?

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- Document how you see the marks of a true Christian in your life and plan to share it with a friend.

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- Memorize 1 John 5:13: *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”*

## PRAY

- Thank God for the security that you have in your salvation!
- Ask that the Holy Spirit and God’s Word will become a source of strength when doubt arises.
- Ask that the Holy Spirit will help you live out 1 John 5:13 and that you will be willing to share the marks of true Christianity with those around you.







# BAPTISM

## *Publicly Identifying with Jesus*

After you accept Christ as Savior, a first step is to proclaim Him as your Lord. You do this by being baptized in water.

### **Read Mark 1:1-11 to start this section**

Mark 1 shows Jesus being baptized at the beginning of His ministry. Water baptism is a spiritually meaningful, symbolic ceremony that *displays* an inward *decision*. It takes the personal choice and makes a public profession. For the Christian, water baptism shows our personal decision to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and to identify with Him, and to follow Him (Romans 6:4-7).

Water baptism has a long history among God's people. In the passage you read, John the Baptist preaches for people to repent. For them, baptism was how they showed outwardly that they had been changed inwardly. John baptized people at the Jordan River until he introduced Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' disciples continued the practice of baptism, the first churches in the book of Acts all practiced it, and it has been a practice of Christ's church to this day.

Still, you may have questions about baptism, so take a moment and read through the following questions.

### **Why do we baptize?**

**Obedience:** Jesus commands us to baptize (Matthew 28:19-20), and we are following His example when we do it (Mark 1:9).

It is a symbol of how we were spiritually buried with Him and raised for new life when we accepted His salvation. It is the first step of obedience on the path of following Jesus.

**Identification:** Baptism also allows us to publicly identify as a Christ follower. When something significant happens in our lives – like a graduation, a wedding, or the birth of a child – we announce it. We want others to be aware of this new milestone we have reached in our lives. Well, baptism gives us an opportunity to announce the most important decision we will ever make – the decision to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior!

**Illustration:** Baptism gives a picture of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and gives a picture of the work Jesus did in our lives. Colossians 2:12 talks about how our sinful nature is put to death and we are raised to walk in new life when we trust in Jesus.

### **Is baptism needed to gain salvation?**

No. Baptism is to salvation as a wedding ceremony is to a marriage. A wedding does not legally make anyone married—that only happens by the signing of a marriage license as witnessed by a licensed church leader or city official. Similarly, baptism is a public display of our love for Jesus, and it represents what God did to seal our salvation.

Remember, we are saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, not by any religious works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus gave salvation to people without baptism (Luke 23:39-43), and Paul

was sent to preach the gospel for salvation—not to baptize for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:13-17). Paul always preached that salvation came by believing on Jesus Christ alone (Acts 16:30-31, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

Some may point out isolated passages that seem to indicate baptism as part of salvation. However, these passages, like Acts 2, Acts 22, and 1 Peter 3, are simply statements of the entire process of accepting Christ and beginning a new life in Him. They show that our sins are washed away by faith in Jesus and that we offer evidence of this decision to believe in Him through baptism. To return to the marriage illustration above: when we ask a young man if he is going to “put a ring on her finger” or we talk to an engaged couple about walking down the aisle, what do we mean? We are clearly using symbolic language to talk about the act of getting married. The same is true about baptism and salvation.

### **Why is baptism done publicly?**

All biblical examples of baptism show people being baptized in public, whether in front of small groups of people (like the Ethiopian official, Paul, and the Philippian jailer – Acts 8, 9, 16), or large crowds (like John the Baptist’s converts or the converts on the Day of Pentecost – John 1, Acts 2). We need not be ashamed of Jesus when we become Christians. In fact, we should want to share our joyous decision with family, friends, and our church. You could even think of baptism as a signaling event that calls your new church family to come around and support you.

### **Why do we baptize by immersion?**

All throughout the New Testament, we see people taken down into water and brought back up (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38-39). John the Baptist’s baptism was a picture of the Old Testament

repentance by purification, which involved the full washing of a person ceremonially (Leviticus 18; Numbers 19; Deuteronomy 23). The Greek word for baptize—*baptizo*—means to immerse. This immersion is a picture of being buried and raised to new life in salvation (Romans 6:4). This is not a major doctrinal issue since we are more concerned with the heart's condition with Jesus, but we want to practice Scripture as closely as we understand it.

### **What if I was not immersed for my baptism?**

Although the method of baptism is not a major doctrinal issue, we do desire to practice the pattern found in the New Testament (see why we baptize by immersion). That is why we invite you to be baptized by immersion if God so leads you and you are ready.

### **How soon should I be baptized?**

In the New Testament, people are baptized immediately after salvation as a first and public step of obedience to Jesus (Acts 2:41, 8:38-39, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 33, 18:8, 19:5). You should be baptized as close as possible to the time of your decision to accept Jesus as Savior. There is no scriptural reason to wait, but all the reason to step out and obey today!

### **Are there sins which could prevent me from being baptized?**

Scripture does not talk about any prerequisite holiness before being baptized. And again, people in the New Testament who accepted Christ were immediately baptized in water. Since baptism shows our decision of repentance and our desire to make Christ our master, there should be a spirit of repentance in the person being baptized. The trouble would come if a person accepted Christ and, while preparing to be baptized, proclaimed, "I am not giving up my immorality. I will do what I

want!” Do you think they are ready to follow Jesus in baptism? In this case, it is wise for Godly pastors or counselors to stop this person and help bring understanding of the purpose of baptism before proceeding.

### **What if I was baptized before getting saved?**

The first question to be considered is, “why were you baptized at that time?” Was it from confusion about preaching that you heard, or was it your heart-felt desire to follow God? Either way, we should obey Jesus when He commands us to be baptized as the public statement after salvation (Matthew 28:19-20). In this case, we invite you to be baptized again as a new Christian.

### **How often can I be baptized?**

In the New Testament, baptism is a first step and a one-time ceremony; there are no examples of people being baptized more than once. Since it is not a magical action that brings salvation or makes you closer to God, we encourage you to not confuse yourself or others by being baptized more than once after salvation.

### **Can infants or children be baptized?**

Although Scripture shows Jesus welcoming and blessing children, it does not show Him baptizing infants, nor are there any passages that show or command this practice. In the New Testament, those who were baptized were new converts to Christianity. Since baptism is a step of obedience after salvation, and since infants cannot make that spiritual choice (due to natural mental development), we do not baptize them. We do, however, dedicate infants to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:27-28). How young can a child accept Christ? It is different from child to child, depending on the child’s development. But if a child understands and accepts salvation, then there is no reason that they should not be baptized as well.

## REVIEW

- What are the purposes of baptism?

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- Why should baptism be done publicly?

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- Why is baptism not a requirement for salvation?

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- What is the significance of baptism by immersion?

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## DISCUSS

- How does baptism provide a picture of both the work Jesus did for us and the work that Jesus did in us?

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- Do you have any questions about baptism?

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## APPLY

- If you were baptized since you became a follower of Jesus, what was that experience like?

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- If you are a follower of Jesus but have not been baptized, what holds you back?

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- Memorize Romans 6:4: *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”*







# THE CHURCH

## *Jesus' Family*

### **When did the Church begin?**

Jesus came to earth with a beautiful purpose: to offer us salvation and to invite us into a life filled with abundance (John 10:10), both in this world and in the next. His presence brought hope and joy to His disciples, who walked alongside Him, witnessed His miracles, and learned from His teachings. However, when Jesus departed from this earth, His disciples might have felt a sense of confusion and even fear. How would they proceed and navigate life's journey without His physical presence?

Jesus answered this concern throughout His ministry, and specifically answered it in His last few days on earth. First, He promised to send the Holy Spirit who would be to His followers everything that Jesus had been and more. Second, He invited people into His family, which would be called the “church.”

*“But He answered and said to the one who told Him, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever*

*does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:48-50)*

*“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)*

*“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)*

When the Holy Spirit came, Jesus’ Church was birthed. The disciples of Jesus took all they learned from Him and began to live it out in a community. They grew from 120 disciples in Acts 1 to 3,000 believers in Acts 2:41 with 5,000 men counted in Acts 4:4. They “*filled Jerusalem*” with their teaching (Acts 5:28) and “*the number of disciples multiplied greatly*” in the days that followed (Acts 6:7).

**But the Church was not just growing in numbers, it was growing in spiritual power. These people were following Christ and becoming more like Him every day:**

*“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things*

*in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:42-47)*

## **This is the amazing record of the early Church, but what is the Church?**

You could find more technical definitions, but, simply stated, the Church is Jesus’ **family**, led under His **authority**, living out His **Word**, on His **mission**. Let’s take time to create a biblical understanding of these four principles that make up the Church.

### **Family**

Jesus’ family is a group of Christ-followers living life together and loving as He commands. Regardless of our diverse backgrounds and individual differences, we are bound together by the transformative power of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. Through His blood, we are not only forgiven but also united as brothers and sisters in faith, exemplifying the love and unity that Jesus Himself preaches.

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:19)*

*“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” (1 Thessalonians 4:9)*

## Authority

Jesus' family is guided by the divine triune nature of God: led by God the Father, pastored by God the Son, and empowered by God the Spirit. Additionally, within Jesus' family, God-ordained elders play a crucial role to lead, teach, and guide the family in alignment with the teachings of Scripture.

*“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22-23)*

*“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers.” (1 Peter 5:1-2)*

*“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)*

## Word

Jesus' family is deeply committed to engaging with the Word of God in various ways. They prioritize not only reading and studying Scripture but also putting its principles into practice in their daily lives. Moreover, they are passionate about sharing their understanding of the Word with others, actively teaching its truths and insights to fellow believers and unbelievers. Their dedication to the Word serves as a primary foundation of the

church and guides them in living out the values and teachings of Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives.

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)*

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

## Mission

Jesus’ family has a divine mandate to evangelize, make disciples and serve others. They are called to spread the message of the gospel far and wide, to every corner of the earth and among all people groups. They are called to be active participants in the mission of making disciples, not to confine their efforts to specific times or places, but to embrace the opportunity to share the love and truth of Jesus Christ wherever they go. This commission is not limited by boundaries or circumstances; rather, it is a continual call that urges them to be ambassadors of Christ’s transformative power in every interaction and situation they encounter. Thus, they constantly seek ways to plant the seeds of the gospel and nurture the growth of discipleship, for their mission is to bring the light of Christ to every heart and every nation.

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the*

*Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)*

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

### **What is the Church’s strategy?**

Jesus’ family first lived this out and accomplished this mission by attending to this simple strategy:

*“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” (Acts 2:46)*

*“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5:42)*

Just as these four principles were lived out in the early church, the same remains true today. As a member of God’s family, commit yourself to the same strategy! You play a pivotal role in fulfilling this command. Dedicate yourself to serve and love Jesus’ family throughout the week, which can be done in numerous ways.

- Participate in weekly gatherings, such as Sunday services at church, where we open our mouths to worship, open our treasure to give, and open our ears to Scripture teaching.

- Connect with smaller groups of other Christ-followers who, together, change their world by loving God and loving people by serving and sharing the Truth of His Word.
- Engage in serving and sharing within the church, community, and world. Look for opportunities to be the hand and feet of Jesus by using your gifts and strengths to support the body of Christ and being a witness for Christ's love wherever you go.

It is important to remember that God does not issue these directives arbitrarily; rather, He understands the profound importance of community. Our relational nature reflects His own, as He designed us to thrive in connection with one another. By actively engaging in these activities, you not only fulfill God's call to build community within the church but also gain deeper insights into His character. Through your participation, you will witness firsthand how God works within and through you to reveal the depths of His relational nature and demonstrate His boundless love for us.

## REVIEW

- What are some key takeaways from this chapter?

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- Do you have any further questions on this week's chapter?

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- What were the two key promises Jesus gave to His disciples before leaving earth? How did these promises address their concerns about living without Him?

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- How did the early Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, grow both numerically and spiritually, and what were some key practices that characterized their life together?

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## DISCUSS

- According to the chapter, what is a simple definition of the Church? How does this relate to being Jesus' family, led under His authority, living out His Word, and on His mission?

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- What are the four key aspects that define Jesus' family, as outlined in the chapter, and how are they supported by biblical passages?

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- What is the strategy of the Church, as presented in the chapter, and how can individuals commit to and apply this strategy in their own lives as members of God's family?

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## APPLY

- Memorize Acts 2:46: *“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”*
- Reflect on your current involvement in the church community. How does your experience align with the early Church's commitment to teach, fellowship, break bread, and pray, as described in Acts 2:42-47? What pieces are currently missing and how can you begin to integrate them into your life now?

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- This week, commit to one area to further engage within your Church. Use this time to strengthen relationships, deepen your understanding of God’s Word, and support one another in living out the principles of Jesus’ family.
- Share with an unbelieving friend what God is teaching you through the church!

**PRAY**

- Pray that as you seek to understand your Church, you will be filled with courage to take the steps to be involved in your Church body.
- Ask for the strength to actively contribute to the growth and mission of your Church, aligning your actions with the timeless principles revealed in Scripture.
- Thank Him for entrusting you with the privilege of advancing His mission and welcoming you into His family.

**ADDITIONAL REFLECTION**

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When you are living in  
obedience to God's Word,  
you can be assured that  
you are living in His will.

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

# start



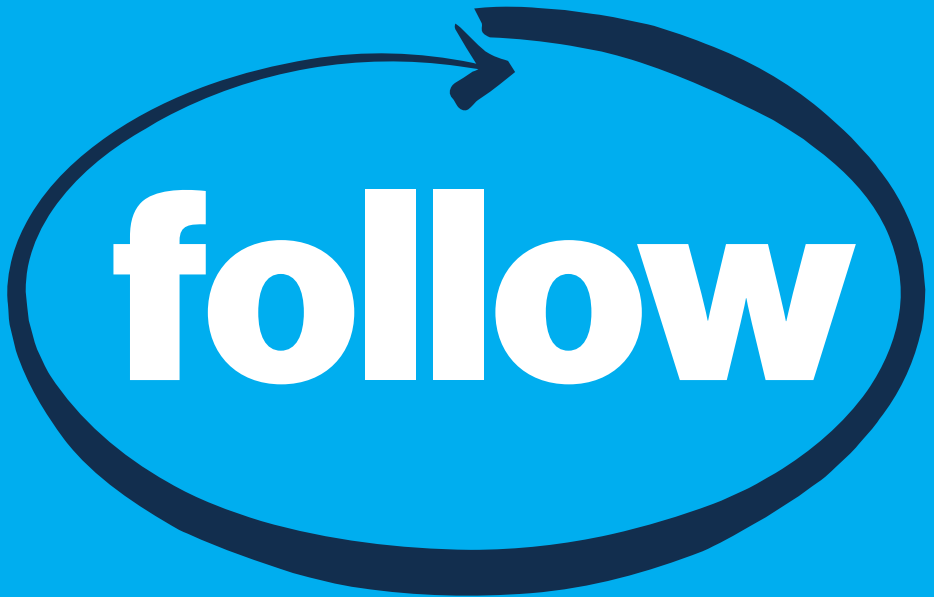
- SALVATION
- BAPTISM
- DISCIPLESHIP
- MEMBERSHIP



# follow

→ LOVE GOD  
LOVE PEOPLE

- SCRIPTURE • COMMUNITY
- PRAYER • SERVING
- WORSHIP • SHARING



**follow**



## SCRIPTURE

### *Following the Word Jesus Followed*

In one of His most famous recorded sermons, Jesus gives His completely clear stance on the entire Bible:

*“Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”  
(Matthew 5:17)*

He goes on to say this about the Scriptures:

*“Whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19)*

Jesus understood that Scripture was the Word of God and that it could not be broken (John 10:35). Because He knew the Bible was God’s own words, completely true and without error, Jesus followed it in every part of His life.

To follow Jesus, we must think and act like Him. Engagement with the Bible is the key to encounter and grow closer to Jesus and experience true life change. Treasure and follow the Word of God in every way and throughout your life.



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It is impossible for us  
to truly experience  
the power of God's  
Word if we're not  
reading God's Word!

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

## How do I follow Scripture?

**Read what it says.** Start at the most basic level: “What does it say?” Read five verses, then ask yourself, “What do these verses say?” Do not interpret, simply observe. Summarize or paraphrase what that passage of Scripture says.

**Learn what it means.** Once you observe what it says, ask: “What does it mean?” The passage may teach a principle or truth, give a command to obey, or state a promise that inspires faith and leads you to trust in God. It may give you an example to follow or avoid. Look at the verses surrounding the passage. Consider the context of the original audience. Think about why Scripture says what it says, and you will do well.

**Put it into practice.** Once you know what it says and what it means, ask, “What should I do about that?” Since the Scriptures are true, there is an implication: you must do something. Scripture should always shape you, just like it shaped Jesus. Indeed, learning is best demonstrated in doing. Based on what Scripture says, change how you believe, think, speak, or act. Let the Bible influence your life by putting it into practice.

## How can I make sure I understand Scripture?

**Read it often.** At the start, Scripture may feel unfamiliar—almost like a new language. One of the best ways to learn a new language is by immersion, taking it in constantly. In the same way, read and re-read Scripture until it becomes a second language. Understanding will follow your familiarity.

**Read it and pray.** Scripture is God’s Word, written by Him for our understanding. Pray and ask the Author to help you understand it. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit is our

Helper and the Spirit of Truth who would always help and teach Christians to understand and obey God's Word (John 14:16-26).

**Read it with others.** Why read Scripture alone? Reading with other Christians can help provide perspective on a passage, point out what someone might have overlooked, and help you find ways to practice it.

**Read it and investigate.** Scripture is not reading you can simply skim through to understand. You will need to put your mind to work. Ask questions about who says what and why; ask who does what and why. Look out for repeated words—they usually indicate importance. Notice causes and effects, comparisons and contrasts. Dig in and investigate! (For more tips, see the “How to Study” section in the back of this book.)

## Where do I start?

1. **Choose what to read.** Choose one of the Bible's 66 books and read one chapter each day. (Tip: New believers should start with the Gospel of John! Look in your Bible's Table of Contents to find it.)
2. **Reflect on what you read.** As you read, ask yourself, “What does this passage say about God, what does it say about me, and how can I apply it to my life?”
3. **Make a new habit.** Your goal is consistency, not volume. Set a time and place that is yours to read Scripture.
4. **Memorize a verse.** Every week, pick just one verse from the passages you read and commit yourself to memorizing it. When we hide God's Word in our heart, it can encourage, challenge, and direct us when we need it the most.

5. **Start today.** Reading a book as large as Scripture can be intimidating, but every journey starts with a first step. Start your journey today by reading Scripture and putting it into practice all day.

**Recommended Reading:**

*Matthew 5:13-20 and 7:15-29 | Matthew 23:1-5 |*

*John 14:15-31 and 17:17 | Luke 24:26-32 | James 1:19-25*

## REVIEW

- What is the purpose of engaging with the Bible?

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- What are some strategies for reading and understanding the Bible?

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- Why is it critical that we begin our time in God's Word with prayer?

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*The Bible is unlike any book that you will ever read. It is a powerful, living, breathing document that will transform you.*

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

*It is one thing to know that the Scripture is the Sword of the Spirit, but it another thing to know how to use it effectively. God expects us to use the Sword, not merely hang it up as a decoration.*

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

- Why is it important that we learn to put into practice what we read in Scripture?

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**DISCUSS**

- What have you heard or been taught about the Bible?

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- What questions do you have about God’s Word?

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- What are some potential obstacles that can hinder you from spending time in God’s Word?

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- What do you hope to accomplish or experience as you study the Bible?

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## APPLY

- How will you start a new practice of following Scripture like Jesus? What will you read and when? Write out a specific commitment and goal here:

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- Memorize John 17:17: *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”*

## PRAY

- Thank God that He has preserved His Word and made it available to you today.
- Ask God to help you develop the habits needed to seek Him through His Word.
- Pray that God will give you wisdom and understanding as you engage with the Scriptures, that He will give you the courage to put into practice, and that He will equip you to share it with others.

## ADDITIONAL REFLECTION

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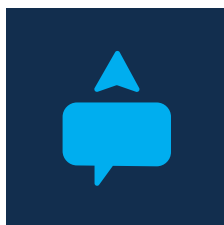
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# PRAYER

## *Praying to God Like Jesus Prayed*

Throughout His life, Jesus prioritized and practiced praying. In fact, Luke 5:16 tells us that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. One of the most successful leaders this world has ever seen withdrew from people to be alone, to speak to God, and to hear from Him. It was this very habit that allowed Jesus to do what He did. Jesus even spoke with God with such intimacy and depth His disciples asked, “*Teach us to pray*” (Luke 11:1). In response, Jesus taught what we call, “The Lord’s Prayer” (Luke 11:1-4). Jesus offers to teach all of us to pray like Him so we may have the same incredible intimacy and deep relationship with God.

To follow Jesus, we must pray like Jesus: talk to God about everything, just like you are in a conversation with Him.

### **What is Prayer?**

#### **Talking to God your Father:**

*Read: Matthew 6:6-7*

Prayer is the privilege of conversing with God, your Heavenly Father. Unlike earthly fathers, God knows everything about you even before you utter a word. He loves you unconditionally



and desires to hear from you. Approach Him with confidence, knowing that He eagerly listens to every word you speak.

### **Conversation and Interaction:**

*Read: Jeremiah 33:3*

Prayer is not merely reciting words into the void; it is an interaction between you and God. It involves both speaking to God and listening for His voice. Recognize that God actively engages with you in this dialogue, speaking to your heart through His Word, His Spirit, and the circumstances of life.

### **Vital and Powerful:**

*Read: James 5:16*

Prayer is not just a religious practice; it is a powerful spiritual discipline that unleashes the limitless power and goodness of God into your life and the world around you. As Dr. Jerry Falwell often said, “Nothing of eternal significance is ever accomplished apart from prayer.”

### **How do I Pray?**

#### **Focus on who God is:**

*Read: Luke 11:2 and Psalm 103:1-5*

Root your prayers in a deep understanding of who God is. Take time to think deeply about His character and nature as revealed in Scripture. Recognize Him as your loving Heavenly Father who cares, provides, and desires to give you an abundant life. Trust in His sovereignty, goodness, holiness, and honorable name.

#### **Invite God in:**

*Read: Luke 11:2-3 and Matthew 6:10*

Prayer invites God’s presence and power into your life. Invite God to be actively involved in every aspect of your life. Ask

Him to lead, guide, and direct you according to His perfect will. Invite His Kingdom to come and His will to be done in your life and in the world around you.

### **Accept God's forgiveness:**

*Read: Luke 11:4 and Psalm 32:5*

If prayer is a conversation and part of your relationship with God, then sin can get in the way. God offers to keep the relationship clear through forgiveness. Acknowledge your sins honestly before Him, repent, and accept His forgiveness. Allow His grace to cleanse and renew you, restoring intimacy with Him.

### **Ask for God's provision:**

*Read: Philippians 4:19*

Present your needs before God in prayer, and trust in His promise to provide for you. Whether it is physical, emotional, or spiritual needs, God is ready and able to supply abundantly. Approach Him with confidence, knowing that He is your faithful provider.

### **Ask for God's deliverance:**

*Read: Luke 11:4, Matthew 6:13, and Psalm 34:17-18*

Prayer has the power to bring about deliverance from trials, temptations, and challenges. When facing difficulties, call upon God for His intervention and assistance. Trust in His faithfulness to rescue you and bring you through every trial.

### **Thank God for everything:**

*Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:18*

Cultivate a spirit of gratitude in your prayers; acknowledge God's goodness and provision in your life. Let thanksgiving be a consistent theme in your prayers, as it redirects your focus to

God's faithfulness and love. Express gratitude for His blessings and mercies, knowing that every good gift comes from Him.

### **Where do I start?**

Prayer may initially feel awkward or unfamiliar. We may feel uncertain of what words to say or where to start. Yet, we must remember that God has graciously granted us unrestricted access to Himself through His Son. In John 14:6, Jesus declares,

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)*

Through Christ, we have direct access to the Father, enabling us to approach Him with confidence and assurance.

Also, as believers, we are not left to stumble through prayer on our own. In addition to access to God through Christ, we are given aid in our prayers through the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26 assures us,

*“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26)*

The Holy Spirit dwells within us and serves as our divine Helper, articulating the depths of our hearts before God's throne of grace. Thus, even when we lack the perfect words, the Spirit intercedes on our behalf, presenting our prayers in flawless accordance with God's will.

When we understand this reality, prayer becomes less about crafting eloquent phrases and more about humbly approaching our Heavenly Father, entering into genuine communion with Him. It is about surrendering our inadequacies and allowing

*We have a responsibility to talk to God. It is not an option. It's not an opportunity. It's not something you do when you have time or feel like it. It's commanded of God that we pray.*

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

*Prayer is not a posture; it is an attitude of the heart. You can pray while you work, drive a car, or fix a meal. You can pray early in the morning, throughout the day, or late at night. The unceasing process of prayer is the constant communication of our hearts to God. Pray often. Pray fervently. Pray without ceasing.*

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

the Holy Spirit to guide our supplications, aligning them with God's perfect purposes.

*Consider these suggestions as you begin to strengthen your prayer life:*

### Praying God's Word Back to God:

Praying using Scripture is akin to having a divine dialogue with God Himself. The Bible is not just a book of ancient wisdom; it is the living Word of God, filled with promises, guidance, and truth. As you read the Bible, allow the words to sink into your heart. Note verses that resonate deeply with you, speak to your current situation, or express your heart's desires. These verses can become the foundation of your prayers. For instance, when facing uncertainty, you might turn to Psalm 23:1-3:

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul." (Psalm 23:1-3)*

As you pray, personalize these words, affirming your trust in God's provision and guidance.

### Fasting:

Fasting is a practice of prayer which involves abstaining from food, drink, or certain activities for a specific period for the purpose of seeking God, gaining spiritual clarity, and drawing closer to Him. While it may seem challenging or unfamiliar, fasting holds profound significance in the life of a believer.

- **Biblical Foundation:** Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we see examples of individuals and communities fasting as a means of repentance, seeking God's guidance, expressing grief, and preparing for significant events. Jesus Himself fasted for forty days and nights in the wilderness before beginning His ministry (Matthew

4:1-11). His teachings also emphasize the importance of fasting as a private act of devotion to God (Matthew 6:16-18).

- **Purpose and Intent:** Fasting is not simply about abstaining from food; it is about redirecting our focus from physical needs to spiritual nourishment. By denying ourselves physically, we create space to cultivate spiritual hunger and dependence on God. Fasting is a way to humble ourselves before Him and acknowledge our reliance on His provision and grace. It is also a powerful tool for self-discipline, helping us overcome the desires of the flesh and align our will with God's.

### ACTS Prayer Model:

The ACTS prayer model offers a structured approach to prayer which is a great tool to use when we do not know where to begin. Not only does this kind of prayer encompass various aspects of our relationship with God, it also allows us to practice praying Scripture to Him. Try using the outline below during your prayer time with God:

- **Adoration:** Begin your prayers by praising God for who He is—His holiness, love, faithfulness, and sovereignty. Reflect on His attributes and marvel at His greatness (Psalm 145:3).
- **Confession:** Take time to confess your sins before God. Acknowledge areas where you have fallen short and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).
- **Thanksgiving:** Cultivate a heart of gratitude by thanking God for His blessings, both big and small. Recall His faithfulness in the past and express appreciation for His goodness (Philippians 4:6).

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Nothing bolsters our faith more than prayer. Even when we bring our smallest request to God, we are exercising faith in Him. He delights to hear us and to answer our prayers. The greater our needs, the greater is His power to meet them.

—*DR. JERRY FALWELL*

- **Supplication:** Present your requests before God with confidence, knowing that He cares for you. Pray for your needs, the needs of others, and for God's kingdom to come (Philippians 4:6).

Remember, the practice of praying like Jesus is not just a religious duty but an opportunity to grow deeper in intimacy with God. Understanding prayer as a conversation with our Heavenly Father, guided by the Holy Spirit's intercession, shifts our focus from perfect words to genuine communion. As you grow in your understanding of prayer, may you be challenged to pray like Jesus, trust in His guidance, practice humility, and embrace the privilege of conversing with our God. Through prayer, we enter the limitless power and goodness of God, deepening a relationship that shapes our lives and the world around us.

**Recommended Reading:**

*Luke 11:1-13 | Matthew 6:5-34 and 7:7-12 | Luke 5:16 and 6:12 | John 10:1-10 and 15:1-17*

## REVIEW

- What are some key takeaways from this chapter?

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## DISCUSS

- Why did Jesus prioritize prayer in His life, and what does Luke 5:16 reveal about His approach to prayer? How can we incorporate this habit into our own lives as followers of Jesus?
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- What are the two aspects of prayer as described in the chapter, and how does understanding prayer as a two-way dialogue impact our approach to communication with God?
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## APPLY

- Memorize Matthew 6:9-13: *“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”*

- Set aside a dedicated time each day. Start with 10 minutes and gradually increase to 30 minutes by using the prayer techniques outlined in this section.
  - Schedule time with God: Incorporate prayer into your daily schedule by designating a specific time for this purpose, ensuring a focused and intentional connection with God.
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- Review and apply prayer techniques together: Collaborate with others to discuss and implement effective prayer techniques. Cover what to do in prayer time and share insights on how to enhance your prayer experience.

## **PRAY**

- Thank God that you can go to Him in prayer.
- Ask that God will give you the discipline to prioritize prayer in your life as Jesus did.
- Pray that God will help you to begin seeking intimacy with the Lord in every circumstance, to reflect a genuine desire to follow in Christ's footsteps.





# WORSHIP

## *Worshiping With a Whole-Hearted Life Like Jesus*

Jesus once summed up Scripture's greatest commandment by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

*“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:29-30)*

Worship starts in the long-standing faith that God is the only God and only One worthy of worship. For Jesus, worship is a lifestyle—an undivided life where your heart, soul, mind, and strength are fully focused on God and demonstrating love for Him.

**To follow Jesus, we must learn to worship like Jesus:  
Worship God by loving Him with every part of who we are.**

*When we get our attention off God, we transfer it from the ultimate to the immediate... Stop living for the pleasure of the moment and start living in the light of eternity.*

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

*Worship is something that is done everywhere you go and in everything that you do, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”*

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

## What is worship?

**Love for God starts worship.** Worship is applying “*worship*.” It is impossible without your heart, soul, mind, and even your strength all captured by God and focused on loving Him.

**A heart condition.** Worship is a test of affection: What grabs your affection? You go where your heart is. Jesus’ death for you was the greatest display of love, but has that kick-started your love for Him? Has His love grabbed your affections?

**A soul focus.** Worship is a test of inner will: What shapes your decisions and direction? The inner part of a person guides every decision. Does God guide you like this?

**A mindset.** Worship is a test of value: What do you think of most and how highly do you think of it? There is nothing higher than God, but do you think highly enough of Him? Or do you think too highly about someone or something else?

**A strength directed.** Worship determines action: What do you use your energy and activity for? The most visible demonstration of focus is where you spend your energy and activity. What do you do, and for whom do you do it?

**Sacrifice.** Worship requires sacrifice. We live out our worship by serving, giving, and sharing. Worship gives us an opportunity to show God’s true place as Lord, King, and Savior of our lives.

## How do I live out a lifestyle of worship?

**Worship God every day in everyday ways.** Turned toward God in love and humility, every day can be used as worship. Your heart, soul, mind, and strength can turn every thought, motive, and action to God. Whether it is special moments of worship through song or everyday acts of obedience and genuinely seeking to please God, all of this is worship. Every

activity, whether it is washing dishes, writing a computer program, or putting a child to bed, can be an act of worship when it is done with an attitude of praise.

**Love God and love others.** You know that worship is love for God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Yet, in that same passage, Jesus also commands you to love your neighbor (Mark 12:28-31). Do you have to choose one or the other? No, worship orders your loves properly: You love God first and foremost. He is your first and highest love. Your love for Him then propels you to love others as He has loved you.

**Bring your first and best.** “First fruits” is the Bible’s term for when people brought God the best of their things. This is where “tithes and offerings” originated. People brought God the first ten percent of all their gains (Deuteronomy 26:1-14). Is there any way that you do not bring God your first and best? Whether effort, money, or time: How can you bring your first and best to God?

**Sacrifice what must be sacrificed.** Worship will always be closely associated with sacrifice. Different types of sacrifices have always represented different things, but Christians are urged to sacrifice ourselves to God (Romans 12:1). What better test of worship is there? What keeps you from God? Offer your entire life to God.

**Turn everything into work for God.** The Hebrew word for worship is *avodah*; *avodah* also means work. The Bible makes clear that God-directed work is worship.

*“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)*

*“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:17)*

Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and do it for the purpose of bringing him glory.

**Recommended Reading:**

*Mark 12:28-44 and 14:32-36 | John 4:21-24 | Matthew 5:23-24 and 6:1-34 | Revelation 4:1-11 and Revelation 15:1-4*

**REVIEW**

- What is worship?

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- What are the specific ways that Jesus calls us to demonstrate our love for God?

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- How does our love for God fuel our love for others?

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- What is the significance of the term “first fruits?”

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- What is the connection between our worship and our work?

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## DISCUSS

- How is biblical worship more extensive than what people typically think of when it comes to worship?

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- How has your personal worship of God grown since coming to know Jesus as your Savior?

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- What keeps you from putting God first in your effort, money, time, and relationships?

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## APPLY

- What are some everyday ways that you can worship God in this season of your life?

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- How do you let your love for God fuel your love for others?

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- What is one thing that you feel God calling you to sacrifice for Him?

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- Make a budget and a weekly schedule that reflects God as first in your finances and in the usage of your time.
- Memorize Mark 12:29-30: *Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.”*

## PRAY

- Thank God for His goodness and grace in saving you through His Son, Jesus Christ.





# COMMUNITY

## *Living With Others Like Jesus Did*

Throughout the four Gospels that record Jesus' life, one remarkable fact often goes little noticed: Jesus did not live or work alone. Jesus traveled, spoke, and ate with twelve others. He sent disciples on missions work in pairs. Speaking to those around Him, Jesus said,

*“You are all brethren...One is your Father, He who is in heaven.” (Matthew 23:8-9)*

Jesus also said about people praying:

*“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)*

What is more, He stated that our number one identifier is our love in life together:

*“Love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)*

He did not simply share the Gospel; rather, He shared His life with those who were around Him. Jesus knew the importance of community and fully embraced it. Will you?

To truly follow Jesus, we must embrace community as He did. Jesus did not choose community because it is effortless; rather, He wanted to illustrate its necessity. Our God is relational, and He crafted us in His image, enabling us to live relationally with one another. Jesus shows us the importance of learning to live in loving support for other Christians and being open to receiving the same in return.

## **What is Christian community?**

### **Family to One Another:**

*Read Acts 2:42-47, John 1:12-13, and Romans 8:14-17*

We become automatic family! In the family of God, we are not acquaintances or strangers; we are siblings, adopted together by the blood of Christ. Just as Jesus taught in Matthew 12:50,

*“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mathew 12:50)*

We are united by our faith and commitment to following Jesus. Through our adoption as children of God, we find that within the church, we are called to encourage one another with the love and care that a family would share. Just as the early believers shared everything and devoted themselves to fellowship, forming a close-knit community centered around their belief in Christ, we are expected to do the same for our new family.

### **Loving One Another:**

*Read John 13:34-35, Galatians 6:10, and Romans 12:9-21*

Love is the foundation of the Christian community, according to Jesus' commandment to love one another as He has loved us. We are urged to do good to all, especially to those who



If you don't have the  
Body of Christ around  
you, supporting you,  
encouraging you, and  
lifting you up, you are  
in dangerous territory  
in your faith.

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

belong to the family of believers, as the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Practically, aspects of love can be shown through hospitality, humility, serving, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn, as this builds the body of Christ through genuine care and empathy for one another. Love is sacrificial; our focus should be to sacrifice our own desires and wants for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ, just as Christ sacrificed His love for us.

### **Encouraging One Another:**

*Read Hebrews 10:23-25 and Colossians 3:16-17*

These passages urge believers to encourage one another, especially as the Day of the Lord approaches. This encouragement is necessary to build each other up in faith and perseverance. We also see the role of God's Word in this process, as believers are instructed to let the message of Christ dwell among them richly, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom. Through mutual encouragement and edification, the Christian community grows stronger in unity and purpose as we build one another up.

### **Guarding One Another:**

*Read Hebrews 12:14-15 and James 5:16-20*

Within these passages, believers are called to pursue peace and holiness. This pursuit is not done alone but is deeply intertwined with our relationships within the church family. As with any family, there are times when we may run into conflict with one another. It may occur through sin done to one another or by one acting out in sin. This is why we are called to guard one another by holding each other accountable through the practice of confession and prayer. By confessing our sins to one another, we not only humble ourselves before God but

also invite the loving support and intercession of our brothers and sisters in Christ. This vulnerability creates an environment of trust where we can openly address areas of struggle and receive the spiritual guidance and encouragement needed for growth. Not only are we personally held accountable, but we are also called to do the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we lovingly confront and support those who stray from the path of righteousness, we participate in God's work of restoration and reconciliation. Through our efforts, we demonstrate Christ's sacrificial love and extend the offer of forgiveness. In doing so, we not only guard the spiritual well-being of our fellow believers but also contribute to the ongoing sanctification of the entire church body.

### **How do I live in community?**

**Embrace church in all its sizes:** The Christian community thrives in both large gatherings and intimate settings. The Bible demonstrates the unity and generosity found in the early church, even as they gathered in large numbers. However, smaller groups, such as Life Groups or Christian friendships, provide opportunities for deeper connections, accountability, and support. Just as Jesus ministered to the crowds but also invested in the lives of His disciples, Christian community includes both the breadth of corporate worship and the depth of personal relationships.

**Make Sunday a habit:** There may be some mornings that are harder than others, but those are the days when church attendance could be most beneficial! Make it a habit to prioritize being present at church, even when it feels challenging.

**Find your own life group:** Personal support can truly make a difference in both challenging times and everyday moments. It is often noted that newfound faith is vulnerable faith.



*Find others you can trust. We are to love others in the same way He loves us— unconditionally. If God lives within you, His love is within you, whether you feel it emotionally or not. You can love others because God loves you.*

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

*Cultivate Christian fellowship.  
We need each other.  
Don't try to go it alone.*

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

That is why having a close-knit group of Christian friends who love, encourage, and guard one another is crucial. These are the kind of individuals who will help keep you accountable and walk alongside you as you seek to reflect Jesus more each day. However, remember, just as you rely on them, they will also rely on you.

**Love like Jesus:** Jesus demonstrated the depth of His love for His friends by sacrificing Himself for them. His love was selfless and sacrificial. He forgave others and served them for their benefit regardless of circumstances. Even within the Christian community, conflicts may arise, but we are called to replicate Jesus's love for one another. As stated in John 13:34-35, we are instructed to love one another as He loved us.

### **Where do I start?**

All of this sounds great but sometimes it may be overwhelming to see how this can be made practical. As a starting point, here are several first steps that you can review to begin your journey to connect with your church family.

1. **Attend Regular Services:** Start by attending church services regularly. This is a fundamental way to become familiar with the community and its members.
2. **Join a Life Group or Bible Study:** Life Groups or Bible studies offer an intimate setting to build relationships and discuss the bible. While you may want to seek out a group that aligns with your interests or life stage, remember God's family encompasses individuals of various ages, stages, and backgrounds, all of whom play a vital role to uplift and strengthen one another within the church.

3. **Volunteer:** Although we will talk more about this in the following chapter, think about serving within the church community. Whether it is greeting at the door, helping with children's ministry, or participating in outreach programs, volunteering is a great way to connect with others while contributing to the community.
4. **Reach Out:** Take the initiative to reach out to fellow church members. Strike up conversations, ask about their lives, and express interest in getting to know them better.
5. **Participate in Events:** Attend church events and activities outside of regular services. This could include social gatherings, community service projects, or special events organized by the church.
6. **Seek Mentorship:** Find a mentor within the church who can offer guidance, support, and wisdom as you navigate your relationship with God and relationships within the community.
7. **Pray for Guidance:** Continually pray for God's guidance and direction as you seek to connect with your church family. Ask Him to lead you to the right people and opportunities for growth and fellowship.

## REVIEW

- What are some key takeaways from this chapter?

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- How does the life of Jesus, particularly His emphasis on community, serve as a model for Christians to prioritize community with one another?

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- Why is making church service attendance a habit crucial for individuals who seek to actively participate in Christian community?

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## DISCUSS

- Reflect on the concept of loving others as Jesus loved. How can Christians navigate conflicts within the community and choose to love one another selflessly and sacrificially, following Jesus' example?

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- Take time to think on your current level of involvement in Christian community. Consider gatherings like church services and Life Groups. In what ways can you deepen your engagement and prioritize active participation in Christian community?
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## APPLY

- Memorize Colossians 3:16-17: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”*
  - Consider your role within the Christian community and your commitment to love others as Jesus loved. How can you actively contribute to cultivating a culture of loving, guarding, and encouraging your church family?
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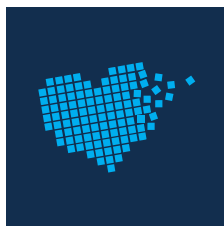
- Take steps this week by doing one of the following: join a Life Group, seek accountability partners, or schedule involvement in a church community event and invite a friend to join you!



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Service is the immediate goal of our salvation. God has called us to serve Him with our lives.

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*



## SERVING

*Serving the good of others  
like Jesus did*

The night before He died, Jesus did something that left His followers stunned. John 13 tells us that He got up from His last meal with His followers, laid aside His clothes, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He started to wash the dusty feet of His disciples—the job of a servant. The God of the universe bowed at His followers’ feet to clean their dust. Speaking to them, Jesus said,

*“Do you know what I have done to you...If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master.” (John 13:12-16)*

Jesus embraced a stunning truth that reverses the norm:



*“Whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant.” (Matthew 20:26)*

To follow Jesus, we must serve for the good of others like Jesus: embrace serving others in every part of your life.

## **What is serving?**

### **Putting Jesus First:**

*Read: Matthew 6:33*

Service becomes a natural outpouring of one’s love and devotion to Jesus Christ. By prioritizing Christ above all else, you align your heart and actions with His example of selfless service. As you strive to emulate His teachings and follow His footsteps, your service becomes an expression of your faith and commitment to Him.

### **Putting Others First:**

*Read: Philippians 2:3*

Serving others creates a mindset of humility and selflessness, mirroring the attitude of Christ Himself. When you prioritize the needs and well-being of others above your own, you embody the essence of true Christian service. Your actions reflect the love and compassion of Christ, valuing others as He valued them.

### **Meeting Physical and Spiritual Needs:**

*Read: Philippians 4:19*

Service encompasses a holistic approach to meeting the diverse needs of individuals, addressing both their physical and spiritual well-being. Just as Jesus ministered to both the physical and spiritual needs of people during His earthly ministry, so too are believers called to engage in acts of service that uplift and nourish the whole person. It is often through meeting the

physical needs of others that God will open the door for Gospel conversations. So, whether it is providing tangible assistance such as food and clothing or offering spiritual support through prayer and encouragement, service reflects the multifaceted love of God.

### **In and Out of Church:**

*Read: Galatians 6:9-10*

Service knows no boundaries of time or place; it is a continuous act of love that extends beyond the confines of church walls and scheduled events. Whether on Sundays within the church community or throughout the week in the broader community, there are always opportunities for service. By saying “yes” to these opportunities, believers demonstrate the transformative power of Christ’s love to both Christians and non-Christians alike, embodying the gospel message in word and deed.

In a world filled with brokenness, the need to serve often becomes apparent, yet it can be overwhelming to know where to begin or how to contribute. As you consider this next section, use it as a starting point for how you can begin!

### **Where do I begin?**

#### **Utilize Your Resources and Spiritual Gifts:**

*Read: 1 Peter 4:10*

As a follower of Christ, you are given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Just as the apostle Paul advises in Romans 12:6-8, discern your spiritual gifts and use them for the betterment of others. If you have a hard time discerning what ways you have been gifted, seek guidance from your church community to discern these gifts and explore how they can be utilized to meet the needs of those around you.

*Just like Jesus, keep your eyes open.  
Be willing to be moved with compassion  
with what you see so that you can make  
a difference in the lives of others.*

*–PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

*We serve not because God needs  
us, but because God wants us to  
experience the blessings that come  
when we give of ourselves.*

*–PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

## **Follow Your Passions and Interests Guided by God's Will:**

*Read: Psalm 37:4*

Your passions and interests are not arbitrary; they are often God-given inclinations that can lead you to areas where your service can have the most impact. Allow your passions to align with God's will, and through prayer and discernment, discover how your unique interests can be channeled into avenues of service to others.

## **Embrace Your Unique Personality and Experiences:**

*Read: Ephesians 2:10*

God has intricately designed everyone with specific personalities, strengths, and life experiences. Your unique combination of traits equips you to fulfill a specific purpose within the body of Christ. Reflect on how your personality traits and life experiences can be harnessed to serve others effectively. Your story, with its ups and downs, equips you with empathy, understanding, and God-given wisdom, all of which are invaluable assets in serving others.

## **Engage in Your Church:**

*Read: Romans 12:4-5*

The church is not simply a gathering of individuals; it is a unified body of believers, each with unique gifts and purposes. God's family needs you, and you need God's family. That is how He designed this all to work. A church comes alive when every member is engaged and serving, and every member grows and thrives when the entire church is engaged and serving. By active participation in your church community, you contribute to the flourishing of the body of Christ.

## Engage in Your Community:

*Read: Matthew 5:16*

As followers of Christ, we are called to be salt and light in the world, actively engaging with our communities to bring about positive change and share the love of God with those around us. Engagement in your community opens doors for meaningful relationships, opportunities to address pressing needs, and avenues to share the hope found in Christ.

By integrating these principles into your life, you can begin to discover meaningful ways to serve others, utilizing both your natural abilities and the spiritual gifts given to you by God.

### Where do I start?

1. **Pray.** Pray that God would show you how to serve others like Jesus did. Let Him know you are willing to do whatever He wants.
2. **Offer.** There are many needs around you. Offer yourself to meet a need in your community. Reach out to church leaders, such as pastors or ministry directors. Express your interest in serving in the church and community and ask about available opportunities. God's family would love you to serve and grow.
3. **Try.** Research shows it might take five tries before you find the right fit. Start serving and consider it a learning experience. Consider what you are passionate about and what skills you possess. Churches have various ministries, including worship, outreach, children's ministry, administration, and more. Choose one that aligns with your strengths and interests. You do not need to wait for the perfect fit before you start: just start!

4. **Stay Committed.** Once you start serving, commit to your role and fulfill your responsibilities faithfully. Consistency and reliability are essential in building trust between church leadership and fellow volunteers.

Serving the church and the community is not simply a duty but a privilege and a calling. As we engage in acts of service, we not only contribute to the growth and strength of the body of Christ but also demonstrate our obedience to God’s commands to love one another and to serve others. Through our obedience and service, we deepen our understanding of God’s love for His people and His desire for us to be His hands and feet in the world. As we continue to serve, we not only impact the lives of those around us but also draw closer to the heart of our Creator, experiencing His love and grace in ever-deeper ways.

**Recommended Reading:**

*John 13:1-17 | Matthew 5:13-16 and 6:1-4 |*

*Luke 6:6-11 and 6:27-36 | Mark 10:35-45*

**REVIEW**

- What are some key takeaways from this chapter?

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## DISCUSS

- How does serving others reflect the example set by Jesus, especially considering His act of washing His disciples' feet?

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- In what ways can serving others become a means of putting Jesus first and valuing others above us?

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## APPLY

- Memorize Philippians 2:3: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”*
- Reflect on your unique skills, passions, and spiritual gifts. How can you leverage these to serve the needs of others in your community or church? Consider taking a spiritual gifts test!

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- In what specific ways can you engage more actively within your church community to contribute to its well-being and growth? Remember, every member has a valuable role to play! Consider reaching out to a pastor or director about serving!

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- Consider a need in your local community. How can you offer your time, resources, or skills to address this need and serve the good of others, following the example of Jesus in John 13?

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**PRAY**

- Thank God for His Son who selflessly served us.
- Ask that God will cultivate in you a heart of genuine service, putting others before yourself just as Jesus did when He washed His disciples' feet.
- Pray that God will guide you to identify ways in which you can serve your church and community.







# SHARING

## *Sharing God with others like Jesus did*

Jesus was always giving His life away. He said that He came to bring life and bring it abundantly (John 10:10). He also never intended for us to keep Him to ourselves. He constantly propelled His followers outward and told them to always pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send workers into His harvest field (Matthew 9:38). Jesus was clear: He came “*to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). And, after His death and resurrection, when He was about to return to heaven, Jesus gave His mission to us saying,

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

**As followers of Jesus, we are called to share the good news of Jesus with others.**

## What is this good news?

It is what we went over back in Chapter 1:

**God loves you!** God created you, loves you, and desires to have a relationship with you.

**You are a sinner.** Sin is the universal human problem, and our sin separates us from an abundant life with God.

**The penalty for sin is death.** The wages of sin is death. It causes physical death on earth and spiritual death in hell.

**Jesus paid your sin penalty with his death.** Jesus lived the life we ought to have lived, and He died the death we ought to have died. In doing this, Jesus substituted Himself in our place so that we are forgiven rather than punished.

**His salvation can come to you by His grace, not your works.** Christ offers this gift of salvation to all who will confess, repent, and believe. Jesus gives life freely. This good news is what Christians have always called the Gospel.

**You must repent and call on God by faith.** When you put your full trust in Jesus and believe in God for salvation, and invite Jesus to forgive you of your sin, you are raised to new life in Christ. In Jesus Christ, the old life is gone, and the new life has come.

## How do I share the Gospel with others?

**Share the good news of Jesus.** The Gospel is profound good news, but it is also remarkably simple. Simply share the six-part explanation that you just read!

**Share your story of Jesus.** Sharing gains traction when you share personally. Share what Jesus has done to change you! You can break your testimony into three parts – what your life was like before you met Jesus, how you came to

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The most basic way to get started is to tell others that you have given your life to Christ and trusted Him as your personal Savior. If you have been genuinely saved, you should be excited about what God has done for you.

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

know Jesus as your Savior, and how your life has changed since meeting Jesus.

**Pray for help and success.** The Holy Spirit is the One who awakens a person's heart to the Gospel and salvation. Take the pressure off and pray that God awakens your hearer's heart. It is His salvation, His message, and His work. You just share it!

### Where do I start?

1. **Learn the good news.** You cannot share what you do not know. Commit the gospel message to your memory so you are ready.
2. **Know your story.** Think through how you came to hear and believe the good news about Jesus. Consider how Jesus changed your life and how you can share that with others.
3. **Write it all down.** When you write something down, it is a great way to learn, remember, and improve. Write down the Gospel and your story so that you are sure you know it well.
4. **Practice sharing.** Whether you practice with a mirror, notepad, or a friend over coffee, practice sharing the good news and your story. You will not share what you do not feel confident about sharing, and practice helps you feel confident.
5. **Appreciate what God has done.** The best way to ensure you share with others is to appreciate the gift you received. Any great gift makes us overflow with joy. Like a great view or experience, when we behold something

wonderful, we cannot help but share it with others. Think about how wonderful a gift you were given in Jesus Christ. Let thankfulness fill your heart and mind and overflow to others!

**Recommended Reading:**

*Matthew 9:9-13 and 9:35-38 | John 1:35-46 | Luke 15:1-32 |  
John 4:34-38 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-9*

## REVIEW

- What are the six parts of the Gospel message?

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- What is impactful about sharing your personal faith story?

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- What role does the Holy Spirit play when we share Jesus with others?

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*Now that you have found eternal life in Jesus Christ, you need to share this wonderful discovery with others. The most natural thing for a new Christian is to want to see his friends and loved ones come to Christ. If you don't reach them, who will?*

*—DR. JERRY FALWELL*

*God has sent us as His ambassadors to tell the world the life changing message of the Gospel.*

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

*If we are going to change the world, we have to keep our eyes open and constantly look for the opportunities around us every day to let people know who Jesus is.*

*—PASTOR JONATHAN FALWELL*

## DISCUSS

- What questions do you have about sharing Jesus with others?

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- What emotions do you experience at the thought of telling others about Jesus?

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- What steps can you take to begin to share the Gospel with the people around you?

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## APPLY

- Memorize the six parts of the Gospel message.
- Make a list of different people in your life who need to hear the message of the Gospel and experience salvation. Pick one and share with them this week.

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- Work on articulating your faith story by answering these three questions: What was your life like before you met Jesus? How did you come to know Him as your Savior? What has your life been like since trusting in Him?

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- Memorize Matthew 9:38: *“Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*

## PRAY

- Thank God for saving you and inviting you to join Him in His mission in the world.
- Pray that God would give you a clear understanding of the Gospel message and the courage and boldness needed to share it with others.
- Pray that God would make Himself known to each person you listed above.





**more**



# THE STORY

## *God walking with His people*

The Bible has 66 books, 1,189 chapters, and 31,173 verses. It was written by the Holy Spirit through 40+ human authors from various walks of life. It covers 1,500+ years of history with 100s of characters on three continents. It's divided into two major "Testaments": the Old (39 books, 1400+ years), and the New (27 books, 100 years). It was primarily written in Hebrew and Greek and includes the literary styles of history, poetry, prophecy, biography, and teaching letters.

The Bible may seem like a daunting book, but God wrote and preserved it to be accessible to His people. He will enlighten you by His Spirit as you read and study it with other believers. Pray and ask Him to guide you!

The Bible is a story, an unfolding narrative encompassing multiple episodes with one focus: God. It is all about Him from beginning to end: who He is, what He values, what He says, what He is doing. It instructs humans how to live in fellowship with God. We were created to be in His story!

This is one way to consider the theme of the Bible: **it is the story of God walking with His people.**

“Walking” is a picture throughout Scripture of God fellowshiping with His people, moving them along His plan. It begins in Genesis 3:8 where God comes *walking* in Eden looking for Adam and Eve. Enoch *walked* with God (Genesis 5), as did Noah (ch.6), Abraham (ch.17), Isaac and Jacob (ch.48). God tells Israel He wants to *walk* with her (Exodus 16, 18, Leviticus 18, 26). Jesus arrives in the story, inviting people to “*follow me*” because “*I am the way.*” Christians are to walk in newness of life, in the Spirit, in love, by faith, in good works, in a worthy manner, as wise, pleasing, properly, and in Him. This theme is summed up in 2 Corinthians 6:15-16:

*“For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’” (2 Corinthians 6:15-16)*

The story has two major sections with eight main “chapters.” In the Old Testament God’s people are promised a Savior who will rescue, redeem, and restore creation. Jesus arrives in the New Testament, announcing Himself as that Savior. From then on people have a visible and tangible way to walk with God, first with Jesus Himself and then with His church family. Thus, in the first part of the story people are “walking *toward* the Savior”, and in the second part people are “walking *with* the Savior”.

The eight chapters (5 in the Old Testament and 3 in the New) show God meeting/moving with His people in a garden, at altars, at a tabernacle and temple, in foreign lands, in a body, houses, and in a city. God’s people are the supporting characters: the world, a family, pilgrims, a nation, exiles, a church, and a kingdom.

**Chapter 1:** “God creates a **WORLD**” (Garden)

**Chapter 2:** “God forms a **FAMILY**” (Altar)

**Chapter 3:** “God delivers His **PILGRIMS**” (Tabernacle)

**Chapter 4:** “God leads his **NATION**” (Temple)

**Chapter 5:** “God restores his **EXILES**” (Foreign Land)

**Chapter 6:** “God sends his **SAVIOR**” (Body)

**Chapter 7:** “God builds his **CHURCH**” (House)

**Chapter 8:** “God brings his **KINGDOM**” (City)

## **CHAPTER 1: “GOD CREATES A **WORLD**” (GARDEN)**

*Time:* Creation - 2000 B.C.

*Scripture:* Genesis 1-11

*Characters:* Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth, Noah

*Content:* Creation, Fall, Flood, Tower of Babel

God created a perfect world. Man and woman sinned and were condemned to die - but God promised salvation. He judged man’s wickedness through a flood but saved Noah’s family. He divided people by languages after they pridefully tried to build a tower to be like Him.

## **CHAPTER 2: “GOD FORMS A **FAMILY**” (ALTAR)**

*Time:* 2000 - 1800 B.C.

*Scripture:* Genesis 12-50

*Characters:* Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Judah and his brothers, Joseph

*Content:* Family History of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

God called Abraham into a covenant relationship and gave him Isaac as the son of promise. He expanded his family into 12 tribes through Jacob. His sons were jealous of their brother

Joseph and sold him into slavery. Joseph was faithful in his Egyptian imprisonment, ultimately being promoted by Pharaoh to manage the country during a famine. Jacob's family moved to Egypt and was saved.

### **CHAPTER 3: "GOD DELIVERS HIS PILGRIMS" (TABERNACLE)**

*Time: 1500 - 1100 B.C.*

*Scripture: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth Characters: Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Caleb, Gideon, Debra, Samson, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz*

*Content: Exodus from Egypt, Law Given at Sinai, Journey to/ Conquest of Promised Land*

God raised up Moses to deliver His people out of Egyptian bondage. He made a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai and gave them His law and tabernacle. He continually provided for them but they repeatedly rebelled. They were condemned to wander in the wilderness 40 years until that generation died. Joshua led the new generation in conquering and settling Canaan. They went through several cycles of rebellion, enslavement, and deliverance.

### **CHAPTER 4: "GOD LEADS HIS NATION" (TEMPLE)**

*Time: 1100 - 722 B.C.*

*Scripture: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk*

*Characters: Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, David, Bathsheba, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah Content: United Kingdom, Temple, Divided Kingdom*

God led His people by spiritual men such as Samuel, but they demanded a king. He gave them Saul who first governed wisely but soon ignored the Lord. God replaced him with David, who defeated Israel's enemies and grew the kingdom. His son Solomon built God a temple. This 120-year period of unity ended, and Israel divided into two kingdoms. The north had 19 evil kings and was conquered by the Assyrians. The south had a mix of 20 good and evil rulers and was taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

## **CHAPTER 5: "GOD RESTORES HIS EXILES" (FOREIGN LAND)**

*Time: 722 - 430 B.C.*

*Scripture: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jeremiah, Lamentations  
Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*

*Characters: Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Mordecai*

*Content: Assyrian/ Babylon Exiles, Return to the Land*

God cared for His people even in captivity. He raised Daniel and his friends as leaders in the Babylonian government and used Esther to save her people during the Persian rule. After many years a group of Hebrews were allowed to return and begin rebuilding the Jerusalem temple. Another wave of settlers returned and rebuilt the city walls. Even in exile, God continued to talk to His people through prophets, promising their eventual restoration and full return to the promised land.



## CHAPTER 6: “GOD SENDS HIS SAVIOR” (BODY)

*Time:* 6 B.C. - 30 A.D.

*Scripture:* Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

*Characters:* Mary, Jesus, John the Baptist, Peter and the apostles, Mary Magdalene, Pharisees

*Content:* Jesus’ Birth, Ministry, Death and Resurrection

God sent his son Jesus to be born of a woman, fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3:15. He grew up in a small town with a quiet life. At about age 30 He launched His ministry, was baptized, tempted by the devil, and chose His first disciples. He had a three-year ministry of teaching and miracles throughout Israel. He was arrested, crucified, buried, and resurrected during Passover Week, ascending to heaven 40 days later.

## CHAPTER 7: “GOD BUILDS HIS CHURCH” (HOUSE)

*Time:* 30 - 90 A.D.

*Scripture:* Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude

*Characters:* Peter, James, John, Philip, Barnabas, Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke  
*Content:* God’s church spreads from Jerusalem to the world, to the Jews first and then the Gentiles.

God sent his Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to launch His church family. The apostles, prophets, elders, and deacons spread the gospel and planted churches around Jerusalem and Samaria, then west into Asia, eventually reaching Rome and regions beyond. The apostles wrote letters to the churches strengthening them in the faith.

## **CHAPTER 8: “GOD BRINGS HIS KINGDOM” (CITY)**

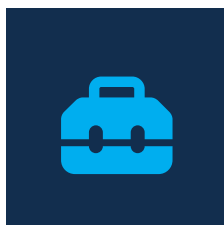
*Time: Future, 1,007 years to eternity*

*Scripture: Revelation*

*Characters: John, Lamb, 24 elders, antichrist, false prophet, serpent, woman, harlot, two witnesses*

*Content: Tribulation, Jesus’ Return, Millennial Kingdom, Eternity*

God gave John a vision of the culmination of human history in Revelation. There is coming a terrible period of tribulation globally that unleashes the powers of hell, wars, disasters, and an antichrist. Jesus will return to earth defeating His enemies and reigning for 1000 years. Satan and the wicked will be judged, and the saints will live forever with God in the new heavens and earth.



## HOW TO STUDY

### *Best practices to help you understand Scripture*

**Remember:** Your goal is consistency, not volume. Quality, not quantity. Every time you read Scripture, do your best to understand it and to put it into practice as fully as possible. Let it change every part of you.

**Start here:** At first, you may find it helpful to refer to these prompts often and record your investigations as you go. But, as you become more familiar with Scripture, it will become second nature to use these prompts and ask investigative questions as you go. Start slow, work hard, repeat, and you will find yourself understanding Scripture more and more.

### INVESTIGATE THE PASSAGE

**Ask who:** Who wrote the passage? Who does the passage address? Who is involved? Who acts? Who gets acted on? To whom was it written?

**Ask what:** What happens in the passage? What is the passage about? What happens before the passage? What happens after the passage? What is the tone of the passage?

**Ask when:** When was the passage written? When did the action happen? Remember, these passages were written at a specific time and place very far from our own! The “when” of the passage often affects the meaning of the passage.

**Ask where:** Where was the passage written? Where did the action happen? These questions will force you to grapple with the original context of the passage.

**Ask why:** Why is this passage in the Bible? Why does God want us to know and study this passage? Why might the author have made the argument in this way? Why might the story have been told in this way? Why does the passage use the words it uses? “Why” is very important to understand, apply, and practice Scripture.

**Ask how:** How does the passage communicate? How does the logic or argument unfold? How does the author use literary techniques in the passage? How does the story or action develop? How are the major ideas explained? How are things or people described in the passage? How do actions affect others? How do others react to action in the passage?

## INVESTIGATE THE DETAILS

**Notice the context:** What is the bigger story that the passage is a part of? How does geography, history, or culture affect the passage? What was it like for the original audience to hear or read this passage? What happened in their lives that would affect how we understand it today?

**Notice the words used:** Are they strange? Surprising? Repeated? What do they mean, and why are they used here? How do



Without a doubt, the  
Bible is the greatest  
book ever written

...

The Bible points to one  
central figure, the most  
unique person in all of  
history—Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God.

—*DR. JERRY FALWELL*

the words have a different meaning today compared to when they were first written and understood?

**Notice the structure:** Does the passage compare or contrast ideas, persons, or objects? Is the passage a story, a letter, a poem, or a list? How does the passage begin and end? How did the author try to shape how you read the passage?

## INTERPRET THE PASSAGE AND ITS DETAILS

**What did the passage mean to its first hearers?** The original audience that first heard the passage understood, learned, and acted in certain ways. You must do your best to understand as they would have understood. The passage can never mean what it never meant.

**What else does Scripture say about this?** How do other passages of Scripture clarify the meaning of this passage? Scripture is cohesive, written by God through men. God is true: He does not contradict Himself. Apparent contradictions call for further investigation. An interpretation of Scripture must not conflict another Scripture. If yours does, start again.

**What do others say about this passage?** Scripture is unchanging truth communicated to Christians across cultures and generations. What the church taught and what others believed should be filtered through Scripture for accuracy. Study Bibles, commentaries, small groups, sermons, and pastors can all be great tools in staying close to historic and tested Christian faith.



## THEOLOGY BASICS

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.  
This is the first and great commandment.”*

*Matthew 22:37-38*

Now, you might already think that theology does not sound like much fun. Theology comes from the Greek words *theos* and *logos*. Meaning the **study of God**. At first some may feel intimidated to study theology. But it might be helpful to realize “theology” is something that we each do all the time. That is right, when you think about it, we all have core beliefs about God. Every decision we make ultimately reveals to us our core beliefs and thoughts about God. What we think about God is the most important thing about us. Theology is about loving God with our minds. When we pursue God in our thinking, our minds are stretched, and our hearts are satisfied with a deeper understanding of God and His nature.

The goal of this section of START is to look at our theological beliefs and help our church know how we should study God so that we arrive at an understanding of God that truly reflects WHO He is and what He IS doing. This leads to the practical

living out of your theology founded on what God shares about Himself in the Scriptures. As a church we believe that when believers know the big God we serve, and live accordingly, we can change the world with the cause of Christ Jesus. We hope this resource helps you walk stronger in your faith and helps you serve others with the truth of God.

## GOD THE TRINITY

*We affirm that there is one God, infinite Spirit, creator of the universe in six historical days, and sustainer of all things, who exists eternally in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one in essence but distinct in person and function.*

We begin our look at theology by asking the question we have all asked at some point in time: “Where does life come from?” Yes, we jump in fast with Theology. But when it comes to the question of where life comes from... so does the Bible! Genesis 1:1 says, “*In the beginning, God created.*”

**Here we find that God’s Word is the source of all Life.** “*And God said.*” “*Let there be.*” “*And it was so.*”

God did not just create a certain part of reality; He made all reality. Genesis 1 portrays God’s Word as the most powerful force in all of creation. We will come back to this idea later in our START book. But for now, we affirm that in six literal days, God created the heavens, earth, humanity, and all of our reality. Creation glorifies God by carrying out His will. Man is made in the image of God, which means man is like God, and represents God.

In essence, man belongs to God. Theologian N.T. Wright shares that most people see God and creation one of two ways. First, that God is everything or everything is God, or more subtly



that God is in everything. And second, that God and creation are firmly separated with a great deal of distance between the two. But there is a third way, the Biblical way, which affirms that God in varying ways connects with His creation, and the Bible is the account of God Himself and how He connects with His creation in the past, present, and future.

### **But who is this God that man belongs to?**

While defining God's name and nature completely is impossible, God designed us from the start to know Him. You might have heard of Moses learning God's name in Exodus 3:14 - *Yahweh*, meaning "I am that I am." God is self-existent, not depending on anyone or anything for existence. He was the being from which all beings have come.

The Bible teaches us that God is our Creator and that he orchestrated the cosmos, the earth, and all that is from His omnipotent, loving, and all-knowing design. We believe that our call is to discover, study, and respect the design and intentionality we find throughout our world and beyond as this truly reveals to us a Creator God.

*"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." (Acts 17:24)*

*"God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." (Romans 4:17)*

In addition to this truth that God is Creator, we find that God is described as immense, eternal, and Spirit. This gives God his **transcendence** (meaning over all existence). Yet, we find in Scripture that he is also **immanent** (personal). This means that

while God is big enough to exist outside time and space, He is equally personal and knows and feels our most personal needs.

*“Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 23:24)*

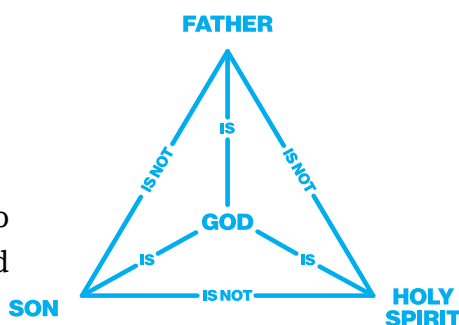
*“He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:27–28)*

The entirety of Scripture reveals something about God’s nature that is only found in the Bible: that God is Trinity.

While the word Trinity does not appear in Scripture, this One-who-is-Three concept very clearly does (Matthew 3:16-17). Many world religions have various forms of “threes,” but the idea of the Trinity is unique to the Christian faith. While all other religions may falsely teach three different gods, or three different manifestations, **we learn this from Scripture:**

- God is three persons.
- Each person is fully God.
- There is one God.

While this concept is mysterious to consider, it communicates the unified and unchanging nature of God.



Credit: Crossway Bibles. The ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Logos Bible Software edition)

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)*

## GOD THE FATHER

*We affirm that the Father is the first person of the Trinity and the source of all that God is and does. From Him the Son is eternally generated and from Them the Spirit eternally proceeds. He is the designer of creation, the speaker of revelation, the author of redemption, and the sovereign of history.*

“Our Father, which are in heaven...” The Bible teaches that we have a heavenly Father, which describes God’s divine intention toward us as the Father designer and builder of all creation. The Bible also identifies God as the Father to the nation of Israel, (Jeremiah 31:9) and, while having always existed, the unique Father to the Son, Jesus Christ.

### **Incomprehensible and Knowable at the same time**

That Scripture teaches the character and nature of God the Father is incomprehensible. While we cannot know God exhaustively (Psalm 145:3) we can know true things about God and *all that Scripture tells us* about God is true (1 John 4:8; 1:5; John 4:24; Romans 3:26). God’s character is known as being marked with goodness, wisdom, spirit, holiness, truth, love, willfulness, perfection, justice, and power.

Beyond this, God the Father is *eternally uncaused, unchangeable, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and unified*. These attributes of deity are true of God the Father, as well as the Son and Holy Spirit.

### **God our Protector and Redeemer**

God the Father serves us as protector, provider, a father to the fatherless, to the oppressed, and a judge of the widows (Psa. 68:5). Finally, we see that God the Father plays a major role in

our redemption. We cannot have an intimate relationship with God the Father until we receive His salvation offered in His Son.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”  
(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*

## JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD

*We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. Eternally begotten from the Father, He is God. He was conceived by the virgin Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. He lives forever as perfect God and perfect man: two distinct natures inseparably united in one person.*

At the core of Christian faith lies the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. He is eternally begotten from the Father, sharing in the divine essence, and co-equal nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17). This belief is grounded in Scripture and has been expounded through centuries of theological reflection.

The term “eternally begotten” emphasizes the timeless relationship between the Father and the Son, indicating the Son’s eternal existence and divine nature (John 1:14; 17:5). This eternal generation underscores the unity and equality within the Godhead while preserving the distinct roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## Jesus' Divine Nature

The Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ, who is fully God, also became fully man through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and birth to the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:20-23). This incarnation fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and affirmed His divine origin while entering fully into the human experience (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 4:15).

Theologians call this unique union of natures the **hypostatic union**. The union of two natures—divine and human—in the person of Jesus Christ is foundation to the ministry of Christ. He is both perfect God and perfect man, without mixture or confusion of the two natures (Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5). Though Jesus experienced temptation, He lived a sinless life. He limited Himself of His full deity to serve humanity yet maintains his perfect nature and union. Scholars refer to this as **the kenosis**. This union ensures that Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified to serve as the Mediator between God and humanity.

*“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)*

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

*We affirm that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and Son and equal in deity. He is the giver of all life, active in the creating and ordering of the universe: He is the agent of inspiration and the new birth; He restrains sin and Satan; and He indwells and sanctifies all believers.*

Exploring the basics of theology unveils a deep connection between God and His creation through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not just a concept, rather He is affirmed in the New Testament as a Person who possesses the same nature as the Father and Son. He serves as an active force to shape our understanding of God in profound ways—as Creator, Governor, Revealer, and Companion.

### **The Spirit as Creator**

Imagine the Spirit in Genesis, hovering over the waters, bringing order out of chaos with each breath. Genesis 1:2-3 vividly describes this creative power at work, executing the divine will of the Father by creating and setting the stage for life to flourish under God’s Sovereign hand. Throughout Scripture, from Job to the Psalms and beyond, the Spirit is celebrated as the giver of life, sustaining all creation with His life-giving energy (John 6:63; Job 23:27; 33:4; Psalm 104:29).

The Holy Spirit is also in the business of “re-creator.” The Holy Spirit is always serving with acts of grace and redemption throughout our lives. The Spirit aims to assist us in knowing and following the Lord, taking some of the fallen parts of our world and redeeming them back to God’s design and purposes.

### **The Spirit as Governor**

The Scriptures use fascinating imagery to describe how the Spirit functions and to explain the ministry the Spirit accomplishes. Metaphors like the Finger of God (Luke 11:20) and Wind (John 3:8, through the OT as *ruach*) capture His influence in restraining evil and guiding humanity towards God’s Holiness (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). The Holy Spirit reveals and convicts us of sin (John 16:8-11), which protects us from evil and makes us more like the image of Christ Jesus.

## The Spirit as Revealer

The Holy Spirit serves as Revealer, overseeing the process of divine revelation. This encompasses both general revelation through creation and special revelation through the Scriptures. The concept of inspiration underscores the Spirit's supernatural influence on prophets and apostles, guiding them to articulate God's Word with clarity and authority. Illumination, another facet of revelation, involves the Spirit enlightening believers to understand and apply God's Word in their lives (1 Corinthians 2:12). The Holy Spirit superintends the entire process of revelation (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

## The Spirit as Companion

Lastly, the Spirit is portrayed as Companion throughout Scripture. Take for example the life of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is woven into every significant event: from His incarnation and baptism (Matthew 1:18; Luke 3:22) to His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection (Hebrews 9:14; Romans 1:4). The Holy Spirit played a role in the significant ministry of Jesus. Jesus' earthly ministry concludes with giving the Spirit generously to be "*with us*" (John 3:34), ensuring God's presence and guidance for the Church and every individual believer.

The Holy Spirit thus is available for every believer. From the start of the Christian life at salvation, the Holy Spirit works to draw us close to the heart of God, speaking to us through circumstances, prayers, and the truths of Scripture to be applied in our daily lives. Leaning into the Spirit's leading, trusting His direction, and faithfully following with obedience is the perquisite for the victorious Christian life.

*"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16-17)*

## THE SCRIPTURES

*We affirm that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, though written by men, was supernaturally inspired by God so that all its words are the written true revelation of God, it is therefore inerrant in the originals and authoritative in all matters. It is to be understood by all through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, its meaning determined by the historical, grammatical, and literary use of the author's language, comparing Scripture with Scripture.*

The opposite of revelation is speculation. Sin separates mankind from connecting and having a relationship with God, yet despite this, God pursues man and makes Himself known to mankind through **revelation**. Creation, history, and the image of God in man all are referred to as **general revelation**. But God does not stop there. God gave us His Word and His Son, which is referred to as **special revelation**.

### What does the Bible teach us about itself?

#### The Bible is Authoritative.

All the words of Scripture are God's Words. "Thus says the Lord..." This is called *divine inspiration*. While no verses in the Old Testament claim that *all* words in the Old Testament are God's Words, we do see passages like Exodus 24:7, Deuteronomy 29:21, 31:24-26, Joshua 24:26, 1 Samuel 10:25, and 2 Kings 23:2-3 that claim the kind of authority over the entire Old Testament that is referred to for the law of God or the covenants of God.

The New Testament however clearly establishes that all of the Old Testament is viewed to be the Words of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

How then did we get the Bible and its authority? 2 Peter 1:21 says, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men



*Revelation: From God to man.  
Inspiration: From man to paper.  
Illumination: From paper to heart.*

*– HL WILLMINGTON  
That Manuscript from Outer Space.*

*of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*” Passages tell us that like the OT, the NT was written by *inspiration* of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 7:12,25; John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Peter 3:2; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; Revelation 22:18-19). The author of the Bible is God through the Holy Spirit to men, who copied down the words of God.

If you are reading this and still not sure that God authored the Bible through the Holy Spirit, then a great question to ask is: if man could write such a book like the Bible, would he? Could man have invented such a message? Why would man want to write such a self-condemning message?

How could such a work be composed that maintains a fully unified message across 1600 years, 3,000 miles of geography, and approximately 40 different authors? In addition, only approximately 27% of the Bible is prophetic and only a small percentage of those prophecies have yet to be fulfilled. To put that into perspective, Peter Stoner wrote in *Science Speaks*, “the probability of one man fulfilling 8 prophecies is 1 in 10 to the 17th power.” The Bible has over 2500 prophecies, 2000 of which have been fulfilled.

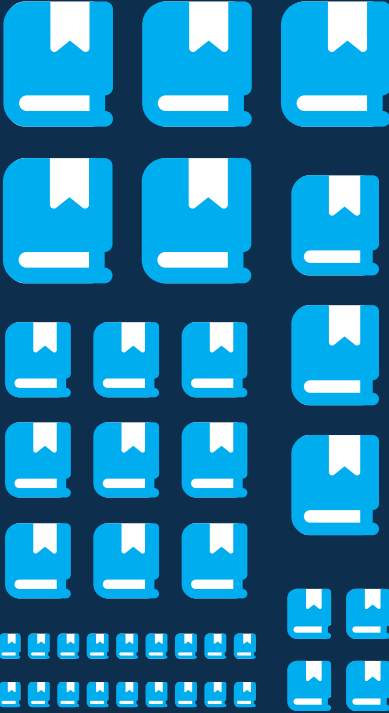
### **The Bible has Clarity**

While some may raise objections, it is remarkable that we have a 99% accuracy rate of knowing what the original manuscripts said. This accuracy underscores the reliability of Scripture as God’s direct communication to us.

While not every part of Scripture is immediately easy to grasp, it is a misconception to think that the Bible is generally hard to understand. In fact, Scripture itself encourages us to teach it to children (Deuteronomy 6; Psalm 78:6-8). Psalm 19:7 tells us that the testimony of the Lord is sure, making even those who are simple in understanding wise. This reassures us

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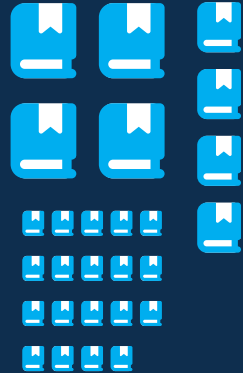


**PSALMS:**  
**LONGEST**  
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**SHORTEST**  
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**3 JOHN:**  
**SHORTEST**  
**NT BOOK** (299 words)

that God's Word is not just for the scholarly; it is for everyone who seeks God's guidance and is open to following His ways.

It invites us into a journey of discovery and transformation, where every page holds the potential to reveal more of God's love, wisdom, and purposes for our lives. As we approach Scripture with humility and a heart eager to learn, we can experience its life-changing power and find direction for every aspect of our journey with God.

### **The Bible is Necessary**

Romans 10:13-17 shows us that the Bible is not just a book—it is essential for understanding the Gospel and sharing it with others. It is also our spiritual nourishment. Matthew 4:4 and Deuteronomy 8:3 remind us that we need God's words as much as we need food!

When it comes to knowing God, the Bible gives us the inside scoop on who He is and what He is like. But remember, knowing God exists and understanding His moral qualities do not necessarily depend on the Bible; they are written in our hearts and seen in the world around us.

The sufficiency of Scripture is like having everything we need for our journey of faith. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us that God reveals what is necessary for us to know right now—nothing more, nothing less. He wants us to search for Him through His Word, knowing that He is also our ultimate interpreter through the Holy Spirit.

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”  
(Psalm 119:105)*

## HUMANITY

*We affirm that God created humans as male and female in His image, and that life is to be respected and guarded from conception until natural death. As image bearers, they are responsible under God for understanding and governing themselves and the world. Adam, the first man, willfully disobeyed God having been tempted by Satan, bringing sin and death into the world. As a result, all persons are sinners separated from God due to their sin nature, which is evidenced in their willful acts of sin; and they are therefore subject to eternal punishment, under the just condemnation of a holy God.*

### CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Did you know that the DNA of the entire human race is 99.9% identical? That means that any two humans only differ in 1 out of 1,000 DNA base pairs (approximately .1%). Everywhere we look we can see design, intelligent function, order, beauty, and aesthetics. While evolutionists claim design by chance and explosion, to this day all our research and scientific study has revealed that there is magnificent design around us that is best explained by being first caused by God.

God did not just make and design men and women for His purposes and glory. Genesis 1:26-27 says that He made man and woman in His image! What is this image? Well, Scripture highlights four distinctives that man has above all other parts of creation. Remember God breathed into man, “*the breath of life, and man became a living being*” (Genesis 2:7). The image of God in mankind includes man’s rationality, spirituality, morality, and immortality. Man is self-aware and volitional; man is designed to relate to his Creator who is Spirit; man has

been given a moral compass that is innate; and man is eternal as part of God's design of eternal life.

## THE FALL

*“God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” (Ecclesiastes 7:29)*

The depravity of man is the most empirically verifiable reality and at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact. Just as God created, it did not take long for Adam and Eve to abuse the gift of freedom found in the given image of God and chose to sin.

### What is sin?

Sin is an act, attitude, or nature that fails to conform to the moral law of God. C.S. Lewis said, “Sin is the human being saying to God, go away and leave me alone.” According to the Genesis account, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to choose to use their freedom to go counter to God's design and command.

### What are the results of sin?

**Inherited Guilt and Corruption:** Because of Adam's initial sin, all humanity inherits a guilt before God. This guilt is not just a feeling; it is a recognition that we have fallen short of God's perfect standard (Romans 5:12-21). We also inherit a tendency or inclination towards sin, which means we often find ourselves naturally drawn towards doing things that are wrong.

Sin turns our relationship with God upside down—instead of seeing Him as a friend, we might want to hide from Him out of fear. Our trust in Him can be replaced by fear, and even our love for others can turn into indifference or hate. Honesty often gives way to lying or deceit. Instead of sacrificing for others, we become focused only on ourselves. Peace of mind

can be replaced by restlessness. And what we might think of as freedom can end up chaining us down.

**Distorted Order and Design:** Sin messes up how things were meant to be. Instead of respecting God's authority, we rebel against it. Instead of feeling clear and peaceful inside, we often feel shame and guilt. Instead of being blessed, we may face consequences or punishment for our actions. Instead of order and beauty in the world, there is suffering and complexity.

We see three profound results that all of humanity inherits from Adam's original sin.

- Sin results in relational breach between man and God. Genesis 2-3
- Sin results in preference for created *things* rather than the Creator God. Matthew 10:38-39
- Sin results in eternal death rather than life. Deuteronomy 32; Romans 6:23

This eternal death refers to eternal complete separation from God and all the protection, love, and presence that He promises and desires to give His creation. This is the ultimate result of the fall.

## **WAIT! THERE IS GOOD NEWS!**

**God's Redemption:** Because of God's love and grace, He does not leave us to deal all on our own with the mess sin makes. Instead, He works to rescue us from what was lost because of sin and fixes what was broken. It is because of the fall and His subsequent redemption through His grace, that what is lost may be rescued and what is broken may be restored.

*"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."  
(Ephesians 1:7)*

## THE WORK OF CHRIST

*We affirm that Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice by the appointment of the Father. He fulfilled the demands of God by His obedient life, died on the cross in full substitution and payment for the sins of all, was buried, and on the third day He arose physically and bodily from the dead. He ascended into heaven where He now intercedes for all believers.*

Ultimately, this chapter and the next is **God's answer** to the fall and the inherited sin nature. Have you ever pondered the question, "If you had a message to give to the entire world, how would you do it?" Well God had that question, and while He could answer that question in an unlimited number of ways, He chose to use His Spirit and His Son to communicate His redemption to mankind.

### JESUS AS PROPHET

Jesus functions as a Prophet by revealing God's will and truth to humanity. He not only spoke God's word with authority but embodied it in His teachings and actions. He was a "for teller" of God's redemptive plan. He "foretold" future events that came to pass (for example: the Fall of the Temple in AD70.) He "forth-told" the teachings and truths of God (Matthew 24-25).

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy as the ultimate Prophet who perfectly revealed the Father (John 1:18) and proclaimed the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).

### JESUS AS PRIEST

Jesus serves as a Priest by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of humanity and interceding on behalf of believers before God.



*“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)*

Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross served as the ultimate atonement for sin, reconciling humanity to God (Hebrews 9:11-14).

## **JESUS AS KING**

Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection attest to His dual nature and redemptive mission. His resurrection from the dead affirms His victory over sin and death, validating His claims to divinity (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Now exalted at the right hand of the Father, Jesus continues to intercede on behalf of believers (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34).

We come back to this theme later in our START: Theology overview. But for now, as Prophet, He reveals God’s truth; as Priest, He offers Himself as a sacrifice for sin; and as King, He rules over all creation and establishes His kingdom. These offices collectively illustrate His authority, compassion, and sovereignty, fulfilling God’s promise of salvation and restoration for all who believe in Him.

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”  
(Philippians 2:5)*

## SALVATION

*We affirm that each person can be saved only through the work of Jesus Christ, through repentance of sin and by faith alone in Him as Savior. The believer is declared righteous, born again by the Holy Spirit, turned from sin, and assured of heaven.*

The term “*salvation*” is the primary biblical term used to describe the gift experienced by individuals who, through faith, receive the benefits of Christ’s atonement. It is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments, conveying concepts such as deliverance, preservation, healing, and restoration of God’s relational favor.

### **Ultimately made possible by God’s Grace**

Salvation encompasses the entirety of God’s work in rescuing humanity from the eternal consequences of sin and bestowing upon us the richness of His grace, including the gift of eternal life now and the promise of eternal glory in Heaven. “*Salvation is of the Lord,*” Jonah 2:9 says, stressing that it is entirely God’s action on behalf of humanity. There is no work we can possibly do to “earn” salvation.

Salvation is both an instantaneous event and progressive experience in the life of the believer. When the Christ follower accepts Jesus Christ as Lord, and Savior, the believer receives *salvation* in three tenses, past, present, and future.

1. The Christian *has been* saved from the guilt and penalty of sin (Luke 7:50; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:9) and is safe.
2. The Christian *is being* saved from the habit and bondage of sin (Romans 6:14; 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 2:19-20).

3. The Christian will be saved at the Lord's return, from all the calamities that are the result of sin and God's curse upon the sinful world (Romans 8:18-23; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

### **The plan of salvation: repentance and faith**

While there are many passages to consider, two passages point us to how to receive God's gracious gift of salvation. These passages share that salvation is received and experienced when there is repentance and faith.

Repentance means changing one's mind about sin so that it affects a change in action. Or simply stated, repentance is when our will changes to such a degree that our purpose does as well. Where once we desired self, now we desire God. Acts 2:38 says,

*“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)*

Prior to coming to a place of repentance, ultimately there must be faith, or simply put belief that God is...well God. And belief that Jesus is God and the sacrificial payment for our sin. Faith is one of the most important theological precepts of the New Testament. Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

## THE CHURCH

*We affirm that there is one church, the body and bride of Christ, and that it is expressed in local assemblies of baptized believers under the discipline of the Word of God and the lordship of Christ. Its mission is to glorify God by making disciples who love God and love people. It administers the ordinances of believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper. The church is led by pastors and deacons. It is self-governing and functions through the ministry of gifts given by the Holy Spirit to each member.*

### **The Body of Christ**

Christianity finds its beginning with Jesus Christ, who is both fully human and fully divine. Jesus, who is the eternal Word of God, took on a physical body—experiencing hunger, work, tiredness, and growth into adulthood, just like any other human. While limited by His humanity, Jesus also possessed all the power and attributes of God because He is God.

The physical body Jesus inhabited is the same one every Christian is connected to spiritually through their identification with Him on the cross. Through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), believers are spiritually united with Jesus Christ in His *vicarious substitutionary death*. In this union, we died with Him, were buried with Him, and rose again on the third day (Romans 6:4-5).

### **Called Out**

From Jesus, followed by a handful of disciples from all walks of life, fast forward over two thousand years and the church is now a global church of billions of believers.

Now, the church is referred to as His body (1 Corinthians 12:27). It is also sometimes known as the local church.

The church is not a building or a society. It is the assembly (*ekklesia*), of regenerated believers who have been called out into holiness and organized to follow the Scriptures faithfully. The universal church is all God's people from all time. Local churches are local bodies of believers centered on worshipping God and living out the Christian faith together.

### **Not Forsaking**

Like Jesus, who was both fully God and fully man, the church is both a living organism and an organized body. While the visible church has human limitations, it also operates with divine authority and spiritual power.

In essence, just as Jesus Christ embodied the God-man in His physical form, the church embodies both human and divine aspects—an earthly manifestation of His eternal purposes and power. The church is empowered and fueled to minister to the entire world until Christ returns, as long as, Christ remains the head of the church, and the church remains obedient to faithfully follow the Scriptures.

The church is organized with leadership (pastors, deacons, and church members) for relational, spiritual, missional, and organizational unity. Church leadership is called to faithfully serve the Scriptures and the church as devoted to Christ. The church is called to regularly administer two ordinances (baptism and communion) as visible presentations of the gospel, celebrating God's gracious salvation, and work on the cross for our own eternal life transformation.

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)*

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

*We affirm that marriage is designed and instituted by God to unite one natural-born man and one natural-born woman in a lifetime covenant with Him and each other. It exists to foster holy, intimate companionship; to serve as an illustration of the relationship between Jesus and His church; and to have and raise children in the faith.*

### **Firm Foundations**

In Genesis 1 after completing His creative work, God declared what He made “good” - except for the man and woman, which He declared to be “very good.” The only thing that we are told was not good before sin and the fall was Adam’s solitude. Thus, we can see God designed from the beginning the foundation that marriage and family is to humanity. In effect, you could say the first wedding occurred in Genesis, God in His sovereignty brought forth Eve, gave her away to Adam as her Father, and even officiated the ceremony as their pastor (Genesis 2).

### **A Shared Identity**

It is crucial to understand that God created and established marriage and therefore only God can define its nature. According to His definition, marriage is between one man and one woman, who become husband and wife for life, and are united as one flesh. This definition excludes any alternatives. Tragically, as sin entered the world and the fall occurred through this first couple, now we fight for the beautiful purpose and design God originally intends through marriage.

The marriage covenant refers to the commitment before God that the husband’s life is no longer just about himself, nor is the wife’s solely about herself. Together, they form a new unity, embracing both their unique identity as husband

and wife and their shared journey in faith as a family. It is a beautiful mystery of oneness and exclusivity, as described in the Bible (Exodus 20:14; Ecclesiastes 5:4; Matthew 19:8-9; Ephesians 5:28-32; I Peter 3:1-9).

### **Family Discipleship**

The family holds a central place in God's plan of redemption through Christ Jesus, as God designed men and women, boys, and girls, for eternal relationship with Him. Through the family, God reveals His redemptive purpose, enabling us to experience His goodness and intimate connection on earth, leading us towards ultimate union with Him in heaven. The family provides the nurture, love, and context for children to best learn the truths of God and experience the foundations God desires and designed for each of us.

*“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”  
(Joshua 24:15)*

## **THE RETURN OF CHRIST**

*We affirm that the return of Christ for all believers in the rapture is imminent. It will be followed by seven years of great tribulation, and then the coming of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom for a thousand years. The unsaved will then be raised and judged according to their works and separated forever from God in hell along with Satan and his demons. The saved, having been raised, will live forever in heaven in fellowship with God and His holy angels.*

## Last Things

We find much of our theological position from the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, and the first verse of Revelation sets the tone:

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.” (Revelation 1:1)*

Christ is the unifying theme around which all events are analyzed as they move toward the final consummation in the rapture, the Tribulation, the glorious appearing, the Millennium, the Great White Throne judgment, and into the New Heaven and the New Earth. Because Christ is the Alpha and Omega, He gives a revelation of that “*which is, and which was, and which is to come*” (Revelation 1:4). Here is a brief overview outlining some of the important events that are shared in Scripture that mark God’s revelation and realization of His ultimate redemption.

**Rapture:** The event where believers in Jesus Christ are suddenly caught up to meet Him in the air, as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, marking the beginning of their eternal presence with the Lord.

**Tribulation:** A period of intense suffering and turmoil on Earth prophesied in the Bible, culminating in the second coming of Christ, and preceding His establishment of a new order to the Earth.

**2nd Coming of Christ:** The visible return of Jesus Christ to Earth in power and glory, as described in Titus 2:13 and Revelation 19:11-16, to establish His kingdom and defeat evil.



**Millennium:** A thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth, characterized by peace, justice, and the restoration of creation, as prophesied in Revelation 20:1-6

**Great White Throne Judgment:** A final judgment where all unsaved dead stand before God to give an account of their lives, as described in Revelation 20:11-15, leading to eternal destinies in either heaven or hell. C.S. Lewis said, “Sin is the human being saying to God, go away and leave me alone. Hell, by the way, is when God does so.”

**New Heaven and New Earth:** The ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise, described in Revelation 21-22, where God creates a new heaven and a new earth, free from sin and suffering, for His redeemed people to dwell with Him forever.

## **What are angels?**

Angels are created spiritual beings that act with moral judgment and high intellect though ordinarily without physical bodies. Scripture shares there is a rank and order to the angels. Angels are named and were in eternity past divided among Michael and perhaps other archangels (Gabriel and Lucifer).

Lucifer, the originator of sin, fell and took with him a third of the angels (Revelation 12:7-8; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Isaiah 14).

Angels are primarily given the responsibility of guarding, protecting, providing examples of worship, and carrying out the movement/will of God (Genesis 3:24; Psalm 18:10; Ezekiel 10; Isaiah 6:2-7; Revelation 4:8; Luke 1:11-19; Acts 8:26, 10:3-8, 22, 27:23-24).

## **What about angels and demons today?**

Scripture teaches us that there is a spiritual world at work, yet unseen, around us (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 12:22). The

Bible shares that there is a spiritual battle happening around us all the time.

### **Do we each have guardian angels?**

Angels work to protect the will of God and care for God's people at certain times. And it might be best to think of our angels working in order and coordination according to the will of the Father. Think of this like a zone defense versus man-to-man coverage (Psalm 91:11-12; Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:15).

### **Where will people spend eternity?**

The Bible makes clear that there are only two eternal destinies for mankind. The saved will live forever in heaven in fellowship with God and His angels (Revelation 5:11; 7:9), while the unsaved will be separated from God forever in hell along with Satan and his demons (Revelation 20:10; 20:15; 21:8).

## **REFLECTION**

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