



Following Jesus

Connect to Jesus & His Church

A 50-DAY DEVOTIONAL



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BIBLE CENTER | CHURCH[®]

3rd Edition • 2024

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ISBN: 979-8-9911616-0-2

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This book is dedicated to the One we follow.
May its words lead people to *Your* words.
May we be disciples who make disciples.

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*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.
There is no commandment greater than these.”*

MARK 12:30-31

Introduction

We pray that the *Following Jesus* Devotional helps you, your family, your friends, and your church learn more about Jesus and His call to each of us to follow Him for a lifetime.

This devotional is designed to help you **be** a disciple of Jesus, **grow** as a disciple of Jesus and **make** more disciples of Jesus.

Jesus started His ministry by making disciples. He said,

*"Follow Me,
and I will make you
fishers of men."*

MATTHEW 4:19

Jesus based His entire ministry strategy on a few who would **follow Him and make more disciples**. **Making disciples** is the central mission and strategy of the church until Jesus returns. At Bible Center, we live out this mission by helping everyone to **Connect, Grow, and Multiply**.

Connect (*Follow Me*) **The Gospel is Central**, we share the Gospel with everyone to help them follow Jesus and participate in the church.

Grow (*and I will make you*) We grow in our love for God and others by building life-changing **HABITS**.

Multiply (*fishers of men*) We intentionally make more disciples by helping others to *connect and grow*. We continue this process until we saturate the state with the Gospel. We are **#ForCountryRoads**.

Our **measure of growth** is the **love** we have for God, one another, and our neighbors.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

MARK 12:30-31

How to Use the *Following Jesus* Devotional

This devotional is designed to help guide you into topics clearly taught in Scripture. It can be used as a daily devotional for an individual or family. It can also function as the content of a class or group. Questions can be answered individually or as discussion-starters.

Many verses are referenced but not fully written out. Looking up these verses in order to read them in context is encouraged. Authority is found in God's words, not the words of this devotional.

Each devotion includes a discussion of the topic, some Scripture-based personal study (verses to look up and questions to answer), and prayer. Often, additional verses are provided for further study (verses are typically NASB).

Following Jesus

Devotions to Know Jesus More

Jesus tells a group of fishermen, “**Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men**” (Matthew 4:19). **A decision to follow Jesus** is made and then a **process of discipleship** begins. These men dropped their nets and followed Jesus. Jesus walked through life with them, teaching them how to help others follow Him.

Followers of Jesus are called **disciples**. Disciples believe **the Gospel** and have started a **relationship with Jesus**. We summarize this process of discipleship with the words **“connect,” “grow,” and “multiply.”**

The Gospel is the Good News of who Jesus is and what He has done. The Gospel is the centerpiece of the Christian faith! It is the most important news you can hear and the best news that you can share with others.

Every relationship grows with time spent together. The hope is that this book helps you spend more time with the Lord by reading the Bible (His words to us) and praying (our words to Him).

In His last words Jesus tells us:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded.”

MATTHEW 28: 18-19

The central command given in this verse is to **make disciples**.

- More disciples are made when disciples go and share the Good News of Jesus (**the Gospel**) with others.
- Disciples are baptized.
- Disciples grow as they learn and live out all that Jesus has commanded.
- **Disciples multiply and make more disciples!**

This small book is designed to help you **follow Jesus**, grow in your love for God, and make more disciples.

Connect



Grow



Multiply



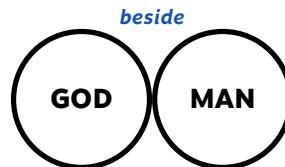
The Gospel in 10 Words

Connect: We follow Jesus and participate in His church. The Gospel communicates how we start a relationship with Jesus and to grow in our relationship with Him. The Gospel is the central message of the Bible and is summarized below in **10 Words**.

God Creates

God **beside** us! God created all things—including mankind—in His own image to have a relationship with Him.

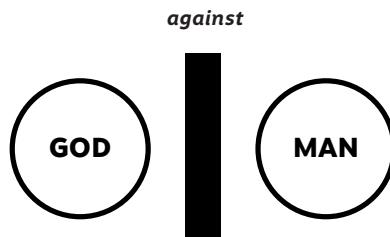
- *Genesis 1*
- *Colossians 1:15-17*
- *Psalm 139*



Sin Breaks

God **against** us! Sin broke our relationship, and we are enemies and hostile toward God, separated from Him.

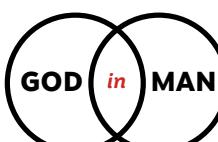
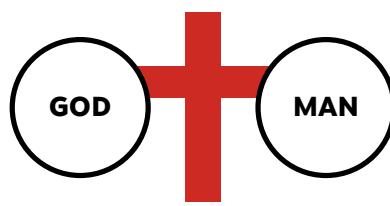
- *Romans 3:10, 3:23, 5:8*
- *Colossians 1:21*



Jesus Saves

God **in** us! Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. He forgives and saves all who place their faith in Him and gives them the Holy Spirit.

- *Ephesians 2:8-9*
- *Romans 10:9-10*



Jesus Transforms

Jesus **for** us! Jesus is for us! Jesus transforms us to be more like Him through a process of growth and calls us to make more disciples of Him.

- *Matthew 4:19*
- *Philippians 1:6*



God Restores

God **with** us! God with us! One day Jesus will return and will renew and remake all things—including you, the church, and all of creation!

- *Colossians 3:4*
- *Revelation 21-22*



Follow Jesus

Deciding to Follow Him

When Jesus began His ministry, He called people to “**repent and believe.**” **Repentance** means turning away from our sin. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s holy and perfect standard in our thoughts and behaviors. **Belief** is our turning to Jesus. We turn to Jesus as the only one who can forgive us and save us from our sin. Jesus paid the penalty of our sin through His death on the cross.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.”

JOHN 3:16

When Jesus approached several fishermen, He told them to “**Follow Me.**” They had to make a decision to either put down their fishing nets and follow or to ignore Jesus and continue what they were doing.

When a man gets down on one knee and asks the woman of his dreams, “Will you marry me?”, he expects an answer. If she simply sits there quietly, then her answer is “no.”

Unresponsiveness to Jesus’ call to follow Him or ignoring the question is the same as saying “no.” All of us have made a decision about Jesus. What decision have you made?

If you haven’t made a decision, you can make the choice now. We follow Jesus **by asking Him** to forgive us of our sin and to be the Savior and Lord of our life. With His help and strength, we turn from a self-centered to a life centered around His priorities.

**Everyone who makes this decision becomes
an adopted and saved child of God!**

Follow Jesus

Believing in Jesus

Answer questions based upon the verses.

Yet to all who did receive Him [Jesus], to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

JOHN 1:12

1. To receive Jesus is to receive the free offer of forgiveness He provides to us through His death and resurrection. According to John 1:12, who receives the right to become children of God?
2. When did you believe and receive Jesus? Is that a decision that you still need to make?

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

ROMANS 10:9-10

3. **Justified** means to be made right before God, with no guilt or shame. What is necessary for someone to be saved and justified?
4. Why would both the words of our mouths and the state of our hearts be important to God?
5. How would you describe the state of your heart? Whom have you told about your decision to turn and follow Jesus?



If you haven't yet expressed your belief in Jesus, now is an opportunity to do so. Tell Him you believe He died on the cross for your sins and that you want His forgiveness.

God Creates

What is God Like?

In many ways, God is *not* like us.

Genesis 1:1 says, “*In the beginning God...*” Before there was anything else, there was God.

- God is the Creator – He made time, space, and matter.
- God is eternal – He has no beginning and no end.
- God is infinite – He can't be measured or limited.
- God is unchanging – The same yesterday, today, and forever.

In a *limited* way, we share in these qualities of God.

- God is all-powerful – He made and controls everything.
- God is all-knowing – He is aware of everything at all times.
- God is relational – God has and always will exist relationally as three persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- God is holy – Every action and motivation is morally pure.
- God is loving – He freely and joyously gives His grace and mercy.
- God is good – He gives to all out of the abundance and overflow of His love.
- God is just – He judges and punishes sin.
- God is patient – He kindly withholds punishment.
- God is merciful – He offers forgiveness through Jesus.
- God is gracious – Jesus freely dies for His enemies.

1. What would happen if any one of these characteristics (attributes) of God were not true?
2. Which attributes of God were demonstrated or shown when Jesus died on the cross for our sins?



Further Study

Colossians 1:16-17 • 1 John 1:5 • John 14:6

God Creates

Our Great God

Write down what you learn about God from each verse:

- Genesis 1:1 –
- Romans 5:8 –
- Hebrews 13:8 –
- Romans 11:33-34 –
- Romans 11:35-36 –

1. What surprised you from these verses?
2. Why is it crucial to our relationship with God that we grow in our knowledge and understanding of Him?
3. How do we continue to grow in this area of our lives?



Join Paul in praying, *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better"* (Ephesians 1:17).

God Creates

God Makes All Things

The Bible clearly teaches that God created all things **out of nothing by the power of His Word** (Genesis 1:1).

God created **man and woman in His own image** (Genesis 1:26-30). God designed us to reflect aspects of His relational, moral, spiritual, rational, noble, and emotional nature.

God declared His creation to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). His creation was just as He desired it to be.

God created **out of the abundance** of His love and grace. God did not create out of boredom or loneliness, but out of an overflow.

God created to display His beauty, greatness, and goodness. All of creation reflects His wisdom, power, and rulership. All of creation—every molecule and galaxy—is maintained and held together by Jesus (Colossians 1:17). Nothing is out of His command and control.

1. What do we learn about a painter when we look at several of his or her paintings?
2. When we look at a painting, in what ways does this fall short of us truly knowing the painter?
3. In addition to creation (God's painting), how does God give us a deeper knowledge of Himself?
4. How can going on a hike lead to worshiping God?



Further Study

Exodus 20:11 • Colossians 1:16-17 • Genesis 1

God Creates

Creation Sings His Glory

Answer questions based on verses.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge."

PSALM 19:1-2

1. How does God's creation "pour forth speech?"
2. How does the beauty of creation point to a beautiful Creator?

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

PSALM 96:11-12

3. How is creation responding to its Creator?
4. What does this teach us about how **we** should be responding to our Creator?

"For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

PSALM 139:13-14

5. Why does every person have worth and value?



Pray that you would respond with worship to God's beautiful creation.

Sin Breaks

The Fall and Its Consequences

God placed **Adam and Eve** in a beautiful garden and gave them responsibility for tending and keeping it. God gave them a **singular command**: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil" (Genesis 1:17-18).

The consequence of breaking this command was "**death**."

Adam and Eve were not alone in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1). A group of angels had sinned, and their leader, **Satan**, entered the garden in order to tempt Eve to disbelieve and disobey God.

Satan tempts Eve to question God's love and provision. **Eve reaches out, and she and Adam sin by disobeying God and eating of the forbidden fruit (often called *The Fall*).**

Immediately, everything changed. **The first sin broke man's relationship with God**. Man, in that moment, became **spiritually dead** (Ephesians 2:1-2), which ultimately leads to **eternal death** (Romans 6:23). The sin of Adam has been passed down to all of humanity (Romans 5:12). Only with God's intervention can man be saved (Romans 6:23, 8:15).

Adam and Eve were filled with **shame**. They covered their nakedness from one another demonstrating a **broken human relationship**. And then, for the first time, they hid from God (Genesis 3:7-8). Like Adam and Eve, we share in these broken relationships. What are some ways that we cope with this brokenness in our lives?

Further Study

Jeremiah 17:9 • Romans 5:12 • Romans 7:14-21

Sin Breaks

Separated From God

What does the Bible teach us about the results of sin according to these verses?

- Ephesians 2:1-3 –
- Romans 3:23 –
- Jeremiah 17:9 –
- Romans 3:10-12 –

1. How would you summarize what you learned from all these verses into one sentence?
2. Romans 1:18-22 – How has God made Himself known to all men?
3. What do men do with this knowledge of God?
4. What is the consequence of this decision?
5. How does sin affect our relationships with one another?



Pray that those in your life who have a broken relationship with God would see their sin and His gracious love.

Sin Breaks

Sin and Suffering

The man and woman who had been given authority over the garden sinned, and everything under their care suffered. When Adam and Eve sinned, God also cursed the ground (Genesis 3:17-18). God designed man for work, and work was part of God's "very good" plan for creation. After the fall, work would now become difficult (thorns and thistles), and we now make a living through sweat and struggle.

Not only was work affected, all of creation was broken and cursed. Creation reflects both God's glory and man's brokenness. Creation longs to be freed from the consequences of sin (Romans 1:20-22).

Natural disasters, disease, and death are a result of man falling from God's holiness and original design.

1. Is suffering from disaster and disease in this world God's fault or man's?
2. What happens if we believe suffering comes from "God Creates" rather than from "Sin Breaks?"
3. How has our ability to provide for our family been impacted by The Fall?
4. How have you seen The Fall impact and influence your children, friends, or relationships?

Sin Breaks

The Results of Sin

Sin – The results of Adam and Eve's sin are passed down to all of us. We are born with a sinful nature and lead lives characterized by sinful desires and actions. Even after deciding to follow Jesus, we still struggle with sin.

Look up the verses to answer the following questions:

1. 1 John 1:8 – This verse is written to Christians. What do we learn from this verse?
2. Our tendency to sin includes our tendency to make decisions based upon our own self-interest instead of the needs of others. When do you relate most to this struggle in your life?
3. How does this struggle affect our relationships?

Suffering – Our sin continues to cause suffering in our lives and suffering in the lives of those around us.

4. How are we supposed to handle suffering according to these verses?
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 –
 - Hebrews 3:13 –
 - Hebrews 4:16 –
 - Hebrews 10:22-24 –



Pray that God uses us as agents of encouragement and hope instead of contributors to suffering.

Jesus Saves

Jesus is Fully God and Fully Man

The Bible teaches that Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus fully took on our human nature, but because He was born by the Holy Spirit. He was born sinless, and He retained all of His divine nature.

Jesus is fully God and fully man at the same time. Never is one nature emphasized (or diminished) over the other.

Jesus experienced human development and human suffering. He went through physical and emotional pain. During His life, He lost his earthly father. Jesus saw His mother's face full of pain as He was dying on the cross. His closest friends abandoned Him as He suffered and died. Jesus truly understands and can sympathize with your pain.

1. What does Jesus' willingness to fully live as a human teach you about Him?

Jesus often displayed His deity. Jesus fed 5,000 with two fish and five loaves. He can control the weather and knows the thoughts and intentions of the people around Him. Jesus has the authority and power to cast out demons, heal the sick, and even forgive sins.

The Bible says that Jesus came "*in the fullness of grace and truth*" (John 1:14, 17). As He spent time with people, His commitment to both compassion and truth was clear. Jesus would comfort the hurting and correct the arrogant.

2. Even with all these outward signs of His deity, many who watched Him did not believe. How would you have responded to Jesus' miracles and signs?



Further Study

Luke 2:40, 52 • Colossians 1:15 • Hebrews 1:1-3

Jesus Saves

Jesus Understands Us

"The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.'"

LUKE 1:35

Why was it important that Jesus was both human and divine? Jesus had to be human in order to stand in our place on the cross. Jesus also had to be God so that He could bear the full weight of the Father's wrath.

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

COLOSSIANS 2:9

1. What percentage of the divine nature was in Jesus?

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

HEBREWS 4:15

2. Jesus experienced hunger, exhaustion, as well as physical and emotional pain. He even experienced temptation and can help us say "no" to sin. How does it make you feel to know Jesus has walked in your shoes and can relate to your struggles and pain?



Pray that we learn to turn to Jesus in our pain and temptation.

Jesus Saves

His Death and Resurrection

Jesus was sent by the Father (John 20:21). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus' mission and His coming were foretold throughout the Old Testament and initiated on Christmas morning.

Many assumed that Jesus would come as a military leader or a king who would save Israel from the ruling Romans. Jesus was not what people (including the religious leaders) expected. Jesus was born in a very humble way to a very common family. He was raised by a carpenter.

Jesus came not for the healthy, but for the sick, oppressed, and broken (Mark 2:17). He did not come to lead from an earthly throne or from the front of an army. Jesus came to live a perfect life dependent upon the Father and then to die in our place and bear the penalty of our sin.

**Jesus displayed His love by dying in our place.
Even while we were considered His enemies,
He died the death we should have died and
offers life to all who believe. (Romans 5:8)**

Read Matthew 27:33-28:7. Write out some of your thoughts from this passage below.

Jesus Saves

The Priority of the Gospel

*"Now I make known to you, brothers and sisters, the **Gospel** which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-2

1. What do we learn about the Gospel from these verses?

*"For I handed down to you as of **first importance** what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-5

2. What is the significance of Paul calling the Gospel something of **first importance**?
3. What are the key components of the Gospel?

"He [the Father] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

4. Jesus took on our sin and we are given His righteousness [right standing before God]. We did nothing and Jesus did everything. The work of Jesus is the centerpiece of the Bible, all of creation, and our lives. How should the work of Jesus impact the way we live? How should it impact our relationships?



Pray

Pray that spreading the message of the work of Jesus takes priority in our lives.

Jesus Saves

Jesus Changes Our Identity

Often, the first thing we learn when we become Christians is what we should and should not do. But the most important thing about us is **our identity in Christ**. The moment we believe, we are made alive in Him; everything about us has changed. Our confidence is not found in our obedience, but in our new identity.

When we place our faith in Jesus, many things immediately happen:

- We are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- We are given peace with God (Romans 5:1).
- We are given the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).
- We receive God's gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- We are given every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3).
- We are considered holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4).
- We are forgiven (Ephesians 1:7).
- We are redeemed, that is, we are freed from slavery to sin, death, and Satan (Ephesians 1:7).

Your worth, value, and identity is now found in the beauty, power, and glory of Christ. If we begin to find our worth in things outside of Christ, we will struggle with self-perception, anxiety, fear, and worry. We must be constantly reminded of who we are in Christ.

Further Study

John 1:12, 3:3-5, 3:36, 6:40 • Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14, 17

Jesus Saves

The Benefits of Knowing Him

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

JOHN 3:16

1. According to this verse, what motivated God to send Jesus?
2. What is necessary to have eternal life?

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

ROMANS 5:1

3. What are the benefits that we have through Jesus?
4. To be justified is to be given a right standing before God and declared forgiven through the death of Jesus on our behalf. Why was it necessary that we be justified?
5. How does faith in the work of Jesus justify us?
6. What happens when we forget who we are in Jesus? Where do we often try to find our identity outside of Christ?



Pray that we see ourselves as the Father sees us in Jesus. Ask God to help you draw your self-perception and worth from Christ and not from the opinions and words of others.

Jesus Saves

Christians are Adopted into the Eternal Family of God

The Bible teaches us that we are adopted by God into His family (Ephesians 1:5). Everyone who believes in Christ is now a **brother or sister in God's family (the Church)**. Even Jesus brings great honor to this spiritual family. When He is told that His mother and siblings are present, He says that **all who believe** are part of His family (Matthew 12:46-50).

God has given us this family to provide support, encouragement, and growth in the faith (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Hebrews 3:13). We are called to spend time together, celebrate together, and worship together (Acts 2:40-42, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Hebrews 10:25).

The church is described as a living body. Each part functions to support and help every other part; together the body grows (Ephesians 4:16). In the same way you value every part of your body, we are to value every part (or person) of Christ's body.

How does your whole body suffer when a single part of your body is hurt—a twisted ankle, a broken finger, or a clogged artery?

Healthy families

- Enjoy one another
- Spend time together
- Laugh together
- Share openly
- Help one another
- Care deeply
- Grow and increase in number

1. What would you add to this list?



Further Study

Ephesians 4:1-3 • 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 • Hebrews 3:12-13

Jesus Saves

Jesus Saves Us into a Family of Humble Learners

1. Hebrews 10:25 – What are Christians called to do in this verse?
2. Why would this be important?
3. Philippians 2:2 – What qualities are Christians called to live out in this verse? What makes this so hard?
4. How do we stay united and of one mind with other Christians?
5. What is the role of pastors in this process? What is the role of church members in this process?
6. Philippians 2:3-4 – This might be one of the hardest commands in Scripture. How can we live out this command with our words?
7. How can we live out this command with our decisions? Our resources?



Pray

Pray that you and your brothers and sisters in Christ can live in humility, putting the needs and interests of one another before their own.

Jesus Transforms

Jesus Changes Everything About Us From the Inside Out

Jesus calls a group of fishermen to follow Him. Jesus then declares He Himself will (over time) make them into **disciples who make disciples** (Matthew 4:19). The process of becoming more like Christ is a process that Jesus Himself works in and through us (Philippians 1:6).

If we view the process of growth as our responsibility, we can become overwhelmed and disappointed. We are unable to change our own desires and internal motivations. It is Jesus who transforms us from the inside out.

We often measure obedience by outward behaviors, but the Bible is clear that our **motivations** are as important to God as our outward actions. The Lord must work in us to change our desires, values, and purposes.

The responsibility of transformation is tricky. **Philippians 2:12** tells us to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*” Indeed we are to work. There should be sweat on our brow and calluses on our hands as we read the Word, pray, and seek God’s face. But the very next verse says, “*for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*”

Like parents holding onto the bicycle of their young child the first time they take off the training wheels, God is doing the heavy lifting, the guiding, and the directing as we pedal as hard as we can.

God calls us to follow Jesus and He makes us into fishers of men. **We connect, grow, and multiply.**



Further Study

Matthew 6:25-34, 7:24-27

Jesus Transforms

Jesus Transforms Our Hearts

"Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me...'"

ISAIAH 29:13

1. The Lord sees their wicked hearts behind their actions, and judges and punishes His people. The people of God were saying and doing the right things, so why was the Lord angry?
2. Why does God care about our love and internal motivations as much as He cares about external obedience?
3. What are some biblical instructions that you enjoy and others that you find frustrating or overly difficult?

"Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

1 PETER 4:11

4. Describe the balance between our efforts and God's strength taught in this verse?
5. How do we practically live this out? Why did God design it this way?



Pray for God's strength in your life. Pray that your words are from Him and that your actions are done for His glory.

Jesus Transforms

Through the Church

The Church includes all who have ever placed their faith in Jesus, regardless of denomination. Ultimately, God alone knows everyone who composes His church.

The local church consists of believers who gather together under the preaching and singing of God's Word and then scatter to live life together throughout the week (Acts 2:44-46, 2 Timothy 4:2-4).

God has given the local church a leadership structure. **Pastors** (elders/overseers) are called to lead and teach the church. **Deacons** are called to serve the church and free up pastors for prayer, study, and teaching (1 Timothy 3:1-7, 8-13, 1 Peter 5:1-5). Many commit to the church through **membership**.

The church members **live life together** in smaller environments as the church throughout the week, caring and praying for one another as family and friends in ever-expanding circles, faithfully **making disciples** (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, 2:46, 20:20, Colossians 3:16).

Everyone serves. Each believer is to use his or her gifts, skills, and resources for the growth, edification, and maturity of the church as it accomplishes its mission of **saturating its community and the world with the Gospel** (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:7, 11-16).

The church celebrates those who place their faith in Christ with **baptism** and is reminded of the work of Jesus and His promised return through the **Lord's Supper**—consuming bread and drink together which represents the body and blood of Jesus (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).



Further Study

Acts 1-3

Jesus Transforms

The Purpose of the Church

Look up the verses and answer the questions.

1. Ephesians 1:12 – How would you describe the *purpose* of the church?
2. Matthew 28:18-20 – How would you describe the mission of the church?
3. Acts 2:42-45 – What are the actions that take place in the church?
4. Acts 2:46 – Where did the church spend time together? What did they do together?
5. What kind of attitude did they have with one another?
6. Acts 2:41, 4:4, 6:7 – What was happening to the church? Why would they keep track of the numbers?



Pray that you and your church would look like this courageous and Spirit-filled group. Pray for boldness, fellowship, and unity.

Jesus Transforms

Through the Holy Spirit

The Bible teaches that there is one God who is three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As a divine Person, the Holy Spirit is not a power, force, or influence. He fully shares in all divine perfections, attributes, and nature. He is to be worshiped, obeyed, trusted, and served along with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Peter 1:1-2).

The Holy Spirit works in, with, and through the preaching, teaching, and sharing of God's Word. The Holy Spirit convicts the lost of their sins and need for Jesus. When someone trusts in Christ, the Holy Spirit seals and lives inside of each person the moment he or she believes (John 3:1-8, 15:26-27, Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Holy Spirit is our **Counselor and Helper**. We can talk to Him any time and all the time. The Spirit helps us understand and apply God's Word. He continually renews, leads, fills, assures, and empowers us to love and obey. He is our source of power. The Spirit is there to help us at all times (John 14:26, Romans 8:14, Ephesians 4:22-24, 5:18-21, Colossians 3:16).

The Spirit testifies to our adoption, strengthens us in our weaknesses, and intercedes for us in prayer. He helps us to grow by transforming and unifying believers together in the church. (Romans 8:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:11, Galatians 4:4-7, Jude 20).

The Spirit gives gifts to each believer for the common good and for the growth and maturity of the church (Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Galatians 5:22-26, Ephesians 4:1-16).

He is always with us and ready to hear our prayers, to comfort us, and to receive our worship.



Further Study

John 14:26 • Ephesians 4:30 • Galatians 4:6

Jesus Transforms

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Jesus told His disciples that it is better that He leave them, return to heaven, and send the Holy Spirit. Jesus says it is better that they have the Holy Spirit living inside them than His own physical presence beside them on earth (John 16:7).

1. Which would you prefer, having the Holy Spirit living inside of you or hanging out with Jesus?
2. How can you walk more closely with the Holy Spirit during your day?
3. Galatians 5:22-23 – Which of these fruits do you see the Holy Spirit producing in your life?
4. Which fruit would you like to ask the Spirit to continue to grow and produce in you?
5. Galatians 5:25 – All believers must live by the Spirit just like Jesus, who lived His life dependent upon the power, work, and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15, 1:35, 2:26, 3:22, 4:1, 4:14, 5:17). How do we walk by the Holy Spirit?



Pray

Pray to the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to fill you and make you aware of His presence and power.

Jesus Transforms

Christians Struggle with Sin

Saved Christians who are being transformed by Christ still struggle with sin. Everyone always has room to grow and mature. Even Paul calls himself “*the chief of sinners*” (in the present tense) (1 Timothy 1:15). John teaches, *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us* (1 John 1:8). **We all still sin!**

It is important to remember that sins are not limited to outward behaviors. If we do not act in faith, with a thankful heart, in the name of Jesus, for the glory of God in everything we do, it is sin (Romans 14:23, Colossians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 10:31). And any sin breaks the entire law (James 2:10).

What do we do with our sin?

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 JOHN 1:9

We are not saved again each time we confess. We are fully and completely forgiven and saved the first time we believe. As Christians, we confess for renewed fellowship with God, not for salvation.

If I speak harshly to my wife, for example, I should apologize and ask for her forgiveness. We did not dissolve our marriage and then restart it when I asked for forgiveness. I know that I hurt her and want her to know that I’m sorry for hurting her, I love her, and I will try not to do it again. By doing so, I deepen our relationship. This is similar to confession for the Christian.



Further Study

Psalm 51 • James 4:8-11 • 1 John 1:5-2:1

Jesus Transforms

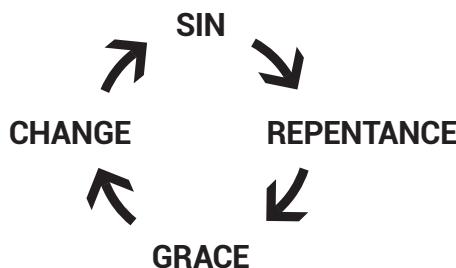
Ongoing Confession and Repentance

1. Is confession and repentance easy or hard? Why?

It is always hard to admit we are wrong. It can feel like defeat and failure. In this moment, we must remember that we do not stand on our merit as our foundation; we only stand on the work of Jesus! God's love does not change even when we sin—we are still identified in Christ. But it should break our hearts to know that we have sinned and turned our back on the One who loves us so much.

Instead of repentance, we often go in one of two directions. We either **pretend** our sin is not a big deal, or we try extra hard to **perform** to earn God's favor.

Our process of **growth in the Gospel** is a cycle:



- Recognized sin should lead to repentance, a fresh experience of God's grace, and a heart changed by the love of Christ. What happens to the growth cycle without repentance?
- When do you find it most difficult to repent? How often should repentance be a part of our lives?



Talk to God about ways you have not honored or loved Him today. Ask Him to remind you of His love and grace and change you to be more like Him.

Jesus Transforms

A Living Faith Grounded in Grace

We are not saved by works!

The Bible is clear—we are not saved by our works or anything of our own merit. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If we were saved by our works, we would have room for boasting. Jesus would have only contributed to our salvation. When Jesus said, *"It is finished!"*, He completed the work on our behalf.

For those trying to earn their salvation, Paul quickly corrects them. **Galatians 3:3** says, *"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"* Only fools try to earn their salvation.

But, a living faith includes works!

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

EPHESIANS 2:10

Immediately after Paul teaches that we are not saved **by** works, but he does teach that we are saved **for** good works.

James states, *"You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone"* (2:24). James sees the connection between salvation and works so strongly linked, that to be absent of good works is to be absent of salvation. *"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself"* (James 2:17). Paul and James are singing the same song—one is emphasizing the element of faith and the other is emphasizing the outcome of good works.

Jesus came in the fullness of grace and truth. Both components are a part of our relationship with Jesus. His grace covers our sin, while His truth convicts us of our sin (John 1:14, 17).



Further Study

James 2:14-26 • Ephesians 2:8-10 • Titus 2:11-14 • Galatians 3

Jesus Transforms

Grace and Works

Many struggle with receiving a free gift. It seems to be within our nature to want to pay others back in order to not owe a debt to anyone. We have a sense of obligation.

This type of thinking leads to:

- A tendency to think God is happier with us when we work harder.
- A belief that God only smiles at us when we are consistent with our devotions.
- An avoidance of God because we are ashamed over our sin.

For those who are trying to please God on their own merits, Paul says "STOP!" In our salvation, Jesus did all the work.

Others mistake God's free gift as a free pass to live however they please. They have disconnected grace from a holy life. They understand Ephesians 2:8-9, but then skip verse 10.

At different times in our lives we will struggle with overemphasizing works or overemphasizing grace. If the Gospel is the red dot in the center of the target, we often hit the outside ring on either side.

20. Which side do you tend to overemphasize?

Jesus stated this balance in a simple way, *If you love Me, you will obey My commands* (John 14:15, 21, 23).



Pray

Pray that God would help you see your misconceptions of the Gospel. Ask Him to give a heart fully trusting in His grace and to live your life for Him.

God Restores

All Things Will Be Made New!

In the end, God will faithfully complete His plan to fully save and restore His people and His world. Through the work of Christ, all of creation will be restored, renewed, and reconciled to Him. All things are made new!

Even now, God is presently at work in our hearts and in His universe, pointing to the day when all things will be made new.

- Presently, we have moments of rest, but one day we will enter into His eternal rest (Hebrews 4:9-10).
- In faith, we recognize that God is with us, but one day our faith will turn to sight and we will see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2-3).
- We experience God's comfort in our moments of pain, but one day we will live sorrow free and pain free.
- We struggle with sin daily, but one day we will be fully redeemed (freed from our slavery to sin) and will struggle no more.

In John 14:1-3, Jesus comforts His disciples by telling them that He will one day come back for them and take them to be with Him forever. We are promised the same!

All of God's creation will be changed: *And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new"* (Revelation 21:5).

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away."

REVELATION 21:1

**God's people and all of creation
look forward to this day!**



Further Study

Romans 8:20-25 • Revelation 22

God Restores

A New Heaven and Earth

John describes the new heaven and the new earth. A city, “*the holy city, Jerusalem*,” comes down and sits on the new earth:

“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are in its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and the lamp is the Lamb [Jesus].”

REVELATION 21:22-23

1. We are to live our lives in light of this eternal reality. Why is it so hard to remember our eternal destiny in the middle of our daily grind?
2. Hebrews 11:13-16 – How can we set our eyes and hearts on this “*better country*?”
3. How would it change our daily perspective, interactions with others, and our anxiety if we spent more time thinking about our eternity with Jesus?

The Gospel message culminates in the church witnessing and sharing in the glory of Jesus for all of eternity in a new heaven and a new earth.

4. John 17:25 – What does Jesus pray for here?
5. What should we do with such an amazing message?



Pray

Pray that your faith would grow and you would daily look forward to the day when you see Jesus face-to-face!

Grow

Jesus saves us and transforms us through a process of **growth** to become more like Him. The way we consistently spend our time and engage with God and others form our habits. Growth takes place as we break bad habits and build healthy habits. It has been said,

“Shape your habits and then your habits will shape you.”

The Bible speaks to our priorities and values. At Bible Center, we use the acronym, **HABITS**, to focus on six ways to grow. As we grow, our love for God, one another, and our neighbors will become more evident in our actions, desires, and words.

**Have a Group
Attend Regularly
Be in the Bible
Invest Faithfully
Talk to God
Share your Faith**

We grow by taking steps to build biblical **HABITS**. In this booklet, each habit is defined and described from a biblical perspective. Some HABITS will come naturally and others will take some work. We can determine our growing edges by:

1. Reflecting on Scripture and asking God for direction.
2. Talking to others who know us well.
3. Using the HABITS assessment tool provided.
 - Scan the code to the right to take the online version of the HABITS Assessment Test; or
 - Take the written version of the test by picking up a companion Grow book and flipping to the back pages.



<https://app.agolix.com/assessment/25649/start>

Commit to growing by taking your next step of growth!

Have a Group

Making Spiritual Friends

As followers of Jesus, we are centered on the Gospel by actively spending time with other Christians and living life together as a part of Jesus' family.

Jesus' mother and siblings arrive as He is talking to the crowd. The crowd announces their arrival, expecting Jesus to turn His attention to His earthly family. Instead, Jesus looks back to the crowd and announces that His mother, brothers, and sisters are those who believe in Him (Matthew 12:46-50). Jesus clearly teaches and demonstrates the priority of His spiritual family. We love our immediate family, but we must remember that our spiritual family carries incredible weight.

Because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we already have a foundation on which to build spiritual friendships. For some, making friends is easy; for others, it is difficult. In the church, it helps to **have a group** for **making spiritual friends**.

1. **Making** There should be some intentionality. Sometimes we can slide into friendships through circumstances, but often we need to initiate conversations and opportunities.
2. **Spiritual** Jesus is our commonality. All of us are on a spiritual journey and can talk openly about our hills and valleys.
3. **Friends** We are designed to enjoy God's good gifts together. Eat, celebrate, and laugh together!

What is your next step for **having a group** and making spiritual friends?

Further Study

Acts 2:41-45 • Hebrews 4:16, 10:25 • 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Have a Group

Life Together

"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart."

ACTS 2:46

1. As described in the verse above, how often were they together?
2. Where were Christians meeting? What does this tell us about their relationships?
3. What were they doing together?
4. Do you have any friendships like this? What is your next step for having more spiritual friends?
5. Why do you suppose this is important for our spiritual growth?

*"But **encourage** one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."*

HEBREWS 3:13

6. What is the benefit of encouragement? What does it prevent?

7. What kind of relationships provide life giving encouragement?



Pray that God helps you **make spiritual friends**.

Attend Regularly

Worship – Enjoying the Purpose for Your Existence

We don't find the purpose for our existence by looking up at the stars or by looking deeply within ourselves. We find our purpose from and in God through His Word.

Everything has been made for His glory—to bring Him attention, to display His beauty and character, and to proclaim how great He truly is!

We are made for that same purpose—*Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory* (Isaiah 43:7). The Lord saves us, not for our sake, but for His (Isaiah 43:25). Ephesians 1:5-6 says that we are adopted as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Worship is anything and everything that brings praise, attention, and honor to God.

God's creation proclaims His glory: *the heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands* (Psalm 19:1). We are called to a similar response, *Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of His works with joyful singing* (Psalm 107:22).

Psalm 145 teaches us that our response to the greatness of God is meditation, telling others, and joyfully shouting about how wonderful He is. Worship is our appropriate response to the character and work of God. “*On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate*” (145:5). Generations will speak of and praise God's mighty acts to the next generation.



Further Study

Psalm 145 • Psalm 139

Attend Regularly

Worship – Experiencing God’s Presence

Worship can be in response to the greatness of God, but it can also be in response to the presence of God in the details of our lives. We can praise Him for simply hearing our prayers, for providing us with food for a meal, or for a conversation with a neighbor or friend.

1. What are some things from today that should cause you to thank and praise God?
2. What would you tell someone who thinks singing is the only form of worship?
3. How can you increase the amount of worship in your life?

Our image and understanding of God can drastically affect our hearts and perspectives on worship. God is infinite, transcendent, and dwells outside of His creation—and He should be praised for this reality. But it is equally true that God chooses to fill His creation with His presence. Jesus tells us He is with us every moment of every day (Matthew 28:20). He is not distant; He is closer than the breath on your lips or the thought running through your mind. The Lord knows and cares about every detail of your life (Psalm 139:23-24). We also praise Him for His ever present help, care, comfort, and love!

4. Do you view God as present with you in the moments of the day? If not, what might be your next step for seeing Him in this way?



Pray that God reveals Himself in the details of your day. Learn to thank Him and praise Him often.

Be in the Bible

Where Did the Bible Come From? How Do I Understand It?

The Bible is described as "**God-breathed**," meaning that it contains the very words of God (2 Timothy 3:16). It is called **holy** (Romans 1:2), meaning that it meets God's perfect standard. The Word of God is also called **living and active**, meaning the Holy Spirit works through the Word to help us understand and apply it to our lives today (Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible was written **by God through men**. Many different styles and **genres** of literature were used by God to teach the mind and the heart. Jesus Himself used poetry, pun, parable, proverbs and hyperbolic speech as He taught in a memorable and masterful way.

God spoke through men using their personalities, circumstances, and purposes to convey His words.

The 39 books of the Old Testament were written and preserved by the Israelites, and the 27 books of the New Testament were determined and chosen by the early church fathers. Only books that were written by those who knew Jesus, did not contradict existing books, and were clearly from God were included in the Bible.

The Bible speaks about many things, but it does not speak about everything. It is **authoritative and trustworthy** when and where it speaks.

God's Word is essential for showing and knowing the way of salvation, for maturing in the faith, and for discerning God's will. It is necessary for the equipping, growth, and transformation of every believer.



Further Study

Ephesians 6:17 • Isaiah 55:10-11 • Matthew 5:17-8

Be in the Bible

The Living and Active Word

"For the word of God is living and active."

HEBREWS 4:12

How can words on a page be living and active?

The Holy Spirit wrote the Word through men. He is also the one who uses the Word to convict the lost, give life, and produce faith (John 6:63, 16:8, Galatians 5:22). The Word is alive because the Holy Spirit works in and through it.

1. How should this reality affect your prayer life as you are reading your Bible?

"No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

2 PETER 1:21

Everything in the Bible was written in the same way—by men moved by the Holy Spirit. How should it impact our lives to know that the Bible is **authoritative and true?**

“What about all those contradictions?”

Perceived inconsistencies disappear when the reader understands the intent of the author, the circumstances of the audience, and the genre of the text. If there were a true inexplicable contradiction, Christianity would have likely disappeared centuries ago.

2. What is your next step in knowing God's Word better?



Pray that God gives you direction and guidance in your study of the Word. Pray that He helps you remember and apply what you learn.

Be in the Bible

Becoming a Self-Feeder

A newborn is completely dependent upon his mother for food and nourishment. Eventually, a baby learns how to grab food off the high chair tray. One day the child can make his own sandwich and pour his own cereal. All of us, as we grow and mature in the faith, will become better at spiritually nourishing ourselves.

As a newer believer, it is crucial to read the Word, sit under the preaching and teaching of God's Word, and learn as much as possible. Even during very early moments of a Christian's spiritual journey, it is crucial to open God's Word for ourselves and begin to read.

Over time, we will grow in our understanding of the major and minor themes of the Bible. Our ability to apply verses to situations in our lives will improve. We will be able to better discern right from wrong.

As we continue to mature, we learn how to use tools to help us. Just like learning how to use a spoon, fork, and knife take time and practice, so will many of these tools. A good **study Bible** will help you understand the context of each book of the Bible. **Commentaries** (books that help you understand the Bible) can be used to answer your questions about particular words, sentences, or spiritual truths.

The most important elements of this journey are **grace and truth over time**. We know that we are not and never will be perfect, but the Lord has fully forgiven us and loves us in Jesus (**grace**). He loves us so much that He will guide us and correct us as needed so that we can live lives of joy and purpose (**truth**). And we must see things from His point of view, knowing that it will take consistency **over time** to see change and grow.



Further Study

Ezra 7:10 • Psalm 119:9-16, 33-34

Be in the Bible

Living in the Word

1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – According to this verse, what is the role of God's Word in the life of His children?
2. What will happen if you don't know God's Word?
3. Paul is speaking to Timothy (a young pastor) and says, "*In pointing out these things [God's instructions] to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following*" (1 Timothy 4:6). What would it look like to be "constantly nourished on the words of the faith"?
4. What happens if you miss multiple meals? Your body feels terrible and you have no energy. God's Word is our spiritual food. What do you suppose happens when we skip multiple spiritual meals?
5. How can you make sure you are consistently growing in your knowledge and understanding of the Bible?
6. How can others play a role in this process? What does the church provide to help you?



Pray for consistency in God's Word. Pray that God would provide friends you

Invest Faithfully

Treasure, Time, and Talents

Jesus lived His life to the glory of the Father, He lived His life with others, and He served even to the point of giving His own life.

Jesus says that "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28). No one ever born was more deserving of being served than Jesus, the almighty King of kings and Son of God. Yet, He chose to live everyday (including His final day) as a servant.

Jesus is our example.

When we serve others, we demonstrate and reflect Him and His love. We are called to serve one another in the big things and in the little things. We are called to serve when we are seen and when we are unseen (Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:10).

Serving is a step of faith.

Many are afraid to use their **treasure, time, and talents** to serve others for fear that they themselves will be left in need. Often, in serving, we are fulfilled as we connect deeply with others and enjoy the satisfaction of living out God's desire and design for our lives.

Christ serves us out of the abundance of His love. We serve others from the overflowing love that He has given us. Peter teaches that we serve with the strength that Jesus provides (1 Peter 4:11). Jesus teaches us that we are to stay connected to Him and He will produce the fruit of service through us (John 15:4-10).

Jesus openly talks about **financial generosity** as an indicator to our spiritual maturity (while greed is considered idolatry, Colossians 3:5). Jesus talked more about money than about heaven.

Everyone must generously serve and give for the church to function and grow. **Have you found a place to serve and help others? Are you giving generously?**



Further Study

Hebrews 6:10 • Galatians 5:13 • Matthew 23:11

Invest Faithfully

Humility and Service

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

1. How do you intentionally regard someone as more important than yourself?
2. Why is **humility** a part of this discussion? Is it ever okay to do some things with a selfish motive?

It is rare to meet people who consistently live out Philippians 2:3-4 in their lives. We all fail regularly. According to this verse, we must *drive* with this in mind, *shop* with this in mind, *eat* our family dinners with this in mind... Every moment of our lives we are to look across the parking lot, table, or counter reminding ourselves that we must treat that person as more important than ourselves.

3. Where did you struggle with this today? This week?
4. Is there a consistent part of your life where this is hard? Is there a particular person that is difficult to serve?
5. How can you better live as a servant in the church? In what ways and when can you put others' interests, preferences, or desires above your own?



Pray for humility and a heart to serve.

Invest Faithfully

Serving With Your Gifts

Believers in Christ are considered “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession*” (1 Peter 2:9). Everyone has incredible value in Christ. This is often called the ***priesthood of all believers***; Christ has made us holy and given each of us full access to the Father.

God has given each of us grace in the form of gifts and skills we are to use for the benefit of others (Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:7, 11-16). Everyone is to be equipped for the ministry and to use their spiritual gifts so that the entire body grows and matures (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Ephesians 4:11-12, 16, 13).

Lists of gifts are given in multiple places in Scripture (Romans 12:3-9, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11).

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

1 PETER 4:10

1. The next natural question is, “What is your spiritual gift?” What are the things that you naturally seem to do well and enjoy? What are the areas of service that seem to use both your passions and skills?
2. Are there areas of your life where other people seem to benefit when you are involved?
3. Are you often complimented when you do something in particular?

If there is a common answer to any of these questions, this is likely one of your spiritual gifts.



Further Study

Romans 12:4-8 • Ephesians 4:11-16

Invest Faithfully

Play Your Part

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6

God knows the needs of His church. When He designed you, He did it with the whole in mind. The church is a beautiful mosaic of pieces that God has woven together.

1. What will be your unique contribution to the whole?

"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the portion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

ROMANS 12:6-8

2. **It's time to put your gifts into action!** How can you use your gifts in your small group and with your friends?
3. What ministry in the church would most benefit from your passions and skills?



Pray that God would help you discern your skills and gifts. Pray that He would use you for the benefit of the whole church.

Talk to God

How? When? What? Where?

Prayer is simply talking to God. Nothing can ever disconnect or hinder your line of communication with God. God is always available and listening. You can talk out loud, you can whisper, you can even talk to Him through your thoughts.

The Psalms teach us that we are to go to God with praise, anger, joy, sadness, and our pain. He can handle our deepest struggles, our darkest thoughts, and our fiercest pain. There is never a reason not to go to God in prayer.

God will always answer our prayers. But it is important to know that God will answer in a way that is best for us. Only God can see the long term results of how and when He answers our prayers. Sometimes God says **"yes,"** other times God may say **"not now"** or even **"no"** if what we want is not best.

Intimacy increases over time. Prayer is a way where we can spend quality time with God. As we grow in our relationship with God we learn to talk to Him as:

- Our Father who knows what's best.
- Our big brother who has our back.
- Our best friend who is always by our side.
- Our Lord who rules the universe in power.
- Our Shepherd who cares about our needs.
- Our wise counselor who knows and guides us.

Our relationship with God is our basis and motivation for our prayer life.

Further Study

Ephesians 3:14-19 • Hebrews 4:16 • Philippians 4:6

Talk to God

Devote Yourself to Prayer

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."

COLOSSIANS 4:2

1. Colossians 4:2a – What level of commitment are we to have to prayer?
2. How can you tell if you are “devoted” to prayer?
3. Colossians 4:2b – How do we keep alert in our prayers?
4. Why would it be important to God for us to have an attitude of thanksgiving in our prayers?

"Praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ."

COLOSSIANS 4:3

5. What is Paul's prayer request?
6. Who benefits from God answering these prayers? Do your prayers benefit you or others?
7. How are we to connect sharing our faith with prayer?



Pray

Pray that you would be devoted to your prayer life and that it would be characterized by thankfulness and the needs of others.

Share Your Faith

Everyone is a Missionary in Everyday Life

Jesus says that we are all “sent ones” (John 20:21). We have been sent on a mission and given an eternal purpose—to share the love of Christ with others. This love is experienced and understood through our deeds and words.

Paul describes the beauty of this mission: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things*” (Romans 10:15). There are few things as beautiful as shining the light into the darkness, bringing hope to the hopeless, and sharing the Good News of eternal life to the spiritually dead and broken.

Each of us have a beautiful **story** (or testimony) of how Jesus has saved us and is continuing to work in our lives. Each of us can share this story with others, giving them a living example of the work of Christ.

We must demonstrate Christ's love by helping others, encouraging others, and giving of ourselves for the sake of others. The Good News of the Gospel is a message that must also be told. The *10 Words* used in the beginning of this study is an easy and memorable way to communicate the Gospel.

**God Creates,
Sin Breaks,
Jesus Saves,
Jesus Transforms,
God Restores**

Each of us has a **circle of influence**—a group of people in our lives that know us, watch us, and often depend upon us. Hopefully, this group includes both those who are Christians and those who have yet to place their faith in Christ.

To this circle, **we demonstrate Jesus' love, we share our story of His faithfulness, and we communicate the beauty of the Good News.**



Further Study

Acts 4:31 • 2 Corinthians 5:20 • Romans 1:16

Share Your Faith

Sharing Your Testimony

1. What are some ways you have seen God at work in your life recently (perhaps some changed behaviors, desires, or even points of view)?

Any part of your answer is a part of your story (your testimony of Christ's faithful work in your life). A story includes a problem, a struggle and a change. Sharing parts of your story when possible will show others how God is at work in your life.

Everyone struggles and everyone is broken. Your story will give others examples of hope that they also can find in the Lord. Don't keep your story to yourself (also don't force it down someone's throat), be willing to share it with others in appropriate settings. We are often given the opportunity to share our stories after first asking questions and listening to others. ***We do not share as though we have all the answers, but as those who have found hope in Jesus.***

"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

1 CORINTHIANS 9:22-23

2. Paul teaches through this section that we are not saved by our works, but by God's grace. We have freedom knowing that our salvation is not based upon us. How does Paul choose to use this freedom?
3. What might this look like for you?



Pray that God gives you opportunities to share with others.

Share Your Faith

Improve Your Ability to Share the Gospel

God _____

Sin _____

Jesus _____

Jesus _____

God _____

Fill in the blanks again and draw the corresponding diagrams.

God _____

God _____ us! God created all things—including mankind—in His own image to have a relationship with Him.

Sin _____

God _____ us! Sin broke our relationship, and we are enemies and hostile toward God, separated from Him.

Jesus _____

Jesus _____ us! God in us!
Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose
from the dead. He forgives and saves all who
place their faith in Him and gives them the
Holy Spirit.

Jesus _____

Jesus _____ us! Jesus is
for us! Jesus transforms us to be more like
Him through a process of growth and calls
us to make more disciples of Him.

God _____

God _____ us! God with us!
One day Jesus will return and will renew and
remake all things—including you, the church,
and all of creation!

Share Your Faith

Verses to Memorize

The verses below are in NIV, but choose any translation.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness.'"

GENESIS 1:26

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

ROMANS 1:20

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

ROMANS 3:23

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

ROMANS 5:8

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast."

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

ROMANS 10:9-10

The Road Ahead

Multiply

From the moment Jesus met the disciples, He openly told them that He would make them **disciples who make disciples** (Matthew 4:19). Later Jesus says, "...as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). In the same way and manner that Jesus lived His life to make disciples, we are called and sent to do the same.

At the end of His time on earth, Jesus speaks one last time to a large group of His disciples and says:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

MATTHEW 28:18-20

One Command

There is only one command (imperative) given in these verses. The command is to *"make disciples."* Everything else modifies and clarifies how to make disciples.

To make disciples, we must be obedient:

Going Anywhere and everywhere we go, we are to live and act like followers of Jesus.

Baptizing Jesus says the first step in discipleship is calling others to "Follow Jesus." Every believer is called to share his or her faith.

Teaching Everything Jesus says is important and must be taught and obeyed. Disciples not only grow the Kingdom of God wider, but they also grow it deeper.

This is our Mission!

We must **make room** in our lives and groups for those spiritually searching and help **make disciples** of those who **Follow Jesus**.



Further Study

Acts 1:8 • John 17:18 • Colossians 1:24-2:5

Multiply

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

1. What is Timothy supposed to pass on to others?
2. To what kind of people should he entrust these words and teachings?
3. What will these faithful men then do?
4. Matthew 28:18-20 – Are you making room in your life for those who don't know Jesus?

Who in your life are you teaching to observe Jesus' commands?

The Father sent Jesus,

Jesus sent Paul,

Paul sent Timothy,

Timothy sent faithful men,

faithful men sent others,

others have sent us!

Who will you send? Make a list of people you could possibly pour into:



Pray

Pray for your list! Pray for them by name.

Unity

In humility, we are to serve one another and consider the other's interests above our own. If we lived this way all of the time, peace and unity would be simple, natural, and sustainable.

Unfortunately, we all continue to struggle with selfishness, pride, and the pursuit of personal comfort.

Not only do we put our interests above someone else's, we might also lash out at those who disagree with us or have a different preference or perspective.

There are hundreds of churches in our area. Many churches did not start with a desire to spread the Gospel, but with a desire to break off from another church to do things their own way. With great sadness, many churches have divided over music style, teaching style, or simple changes of atmosphere or environment within the church.

Jesus wanted the world to see His love through our unity (John 17:22-23), yet so often the world sees our pride and pettiness—often divided and even hostile.

We must commit ourselves to peace and unity through loving one another more than ourselves. We rally around the core truths of the Gospel and speak with charity and humility in areas of differing opinions and preferences.

We hold our core beliefs with a closed hand and we hold our preferences with an open hand, happily willing to discuss and disagree.

Our commitment to unity must be stronger than our commitment to our preferences.

**In essentials unity, in non-essentials
liberty, in all things charity.**



Further Study

Philippians 2:1-4 • Romans 12:10, 18

Unity

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

EPHESIANS 4:4-6

This passage is an example of all the things that unite us as believers. Each thing listed is significant and weighty. All of these radically impact our lives and our eternity.

1. Why do we typically highlight our differences more than our commonalities?
2. All of us struggle with selfishness. Where in your life are you presently putting one of your preferences above unity and peace?
3. Is there conflict in your life that you could remedy through humility and love? What is your next step?
4. How did Jesus respond to being mistreated?
5. What must we learn from His example to experience peace and unity?



Pray that you would be an example of humility and love to others.

Where Do I Go From Here?

Guided devotionals are valuable and helpful. They help us take those first steps of following Jesus. As we find our footing, understand the foundations of the faith, and develop spiritual habits, our journey with Jesus begins.

An important step for every Christian is to learn how to read, study, and apply God's Word. Below are some questions designed to help you ask the right questions to be able to correctly understand and apply the Bible:

What is the author's point?

The first question is **not**, "What does this mean to me?", but "What is God's intended purpose?" Recognize verses must be understood in their context. The sentences found before and after help us understand the author's flow of thought and the intention of the verses. So, it will be helpful at times to open up your Bible and read the verses given in their context.

How do these verses speak to the situation of the readers of that day?

Each book was written in a particular way (genre), at a particular time, to a particular person or group. There was a purpose and a goal for each book and verse. We must first hear the text the way the reader heard the text. This may mean doing a little research on the recipients of a book of the Bible.

How do the truths, commands, and principles of these verses speak to how I ought to think, feel, or act?

God's Word is designed to grow and transform us to be more like Jesus. Application rarely happens by accident. We need to think through what we are learning and seek change through prayer, accountability, and intentionality.



About the Author

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Mike has served as an international missionary, church planter, elder, and staff pastor over his last 20 years of ministry. His passion is to walk with God and build movements of disciple-making leaders.

Mike and his wife have been married for more than 28 years and have two adult children.



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