

THE
SIMPLE
GOSPEL

AND HOW IT
WORKS IN US

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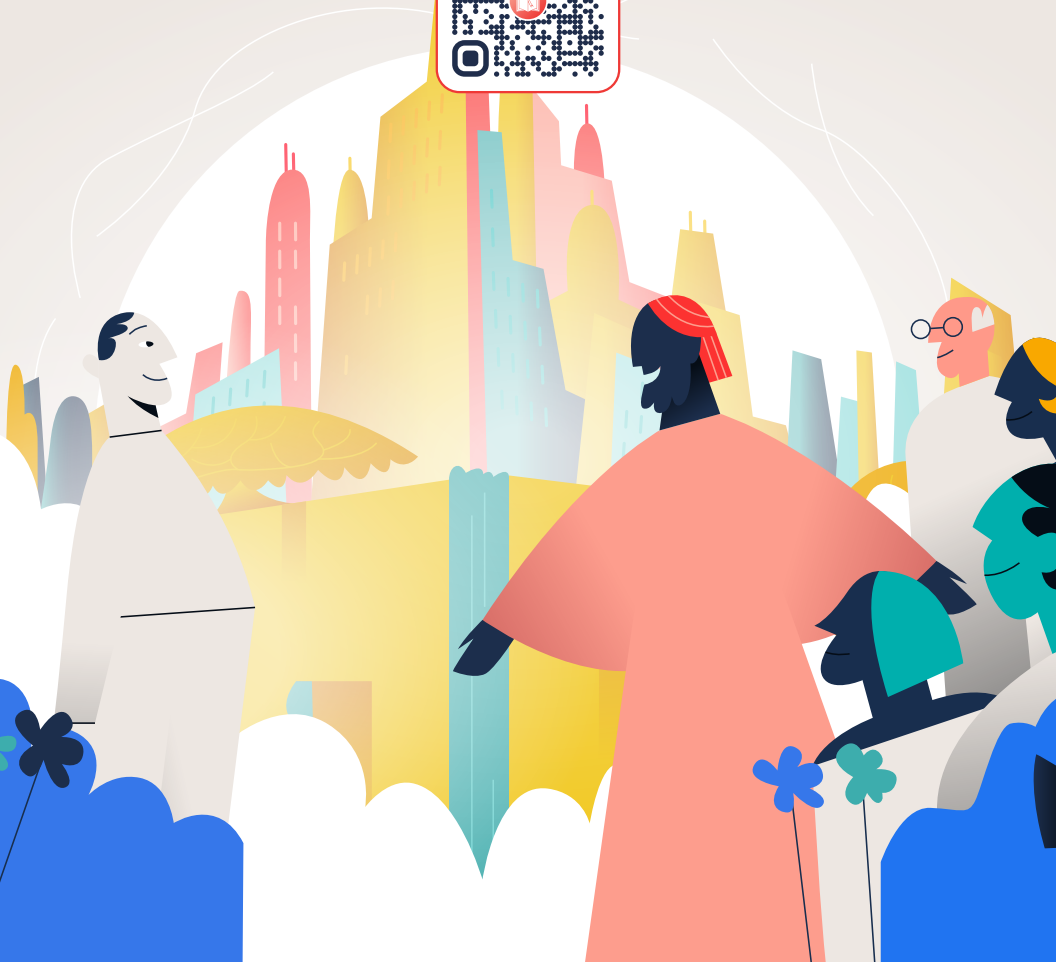
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INTRODUCTION



Trying to understand the Gospel (the good news of Jesus) is like trying to understand love. The basics are simple, but we only *understand* it as much as we *live* it.

Unless we know the basics of the Gospel, we can't experience it. The Gospel is God's greatest gift to us, but we can't accept it if we don't know it exists.

This is the Gospel: God promises to love and forgive us, giving us life that won't end, freedom from evil, and close friendship with him as long as we trust and obey him in love. If we surrender to God and choose him over everything else, he will wash away our evil and live in close relationship with us, empowering us to live pure lives that will never end.

One of the easiest ways to remember the Gospel is by memorizing *The Salvation Poem*: a 6-line song that communicates the essence of the Gospel simply enough that a child can understand it. Here it is:

Jesus, You died upon a cross
And rose again to save the lost
Forgive me now of all my sin
Come be my Savior, Lord, and Friend
Change my life and make it new
And help me, Lord, to live for You

The purpose of this book is to give you a heart-level understanding of the simple Gospel and how it works in you.

The first chapter gives a general overview of the Gospel and how it impacts our lives. The following six chapters cover what the Bible says about the concepts in *The Salvation Poem*, one line at a time. The book then concludes with three chapters of practical tips for living a healthy Christian life.

In this book are the tools you need to let the simple Gospel begin to work in you.



CHAPTER 1

A SIMPLE OVERVIEW OF THE GOSPEL

I have good news. God promises to love and forgive us, giving us life that won't end, freedom from evil, and close friendship with him as long as we trust and obey him in love.¹

Do you believe this? Do you see what it means for you?

I didn't for most of my life, and I grew up in the church.

The Bible says we were born to love, obey, and enjoy God forever,² but we can't.³

Why?

Because we were born separated from him in two ways.

First, we don't know him, and we can't love someone we don't know.⁴

Second, we are born with evil desires that separate us from the life, knowledge, and love of God.⁵ Our evil desires are the cause for death, sickness, injustice, war—all of life's sorrows.⁶

How do our evil desires separate us from God?

The core of evil is selfishness which harms relationships. As a man grows closer to his wife, he more easily recognizes how his words, actions, and thoughts may offend her. So it is in our relationship with God. The closer we grow to God, the more we understand how our evil breaks closeness with him.

What was God's response to our separation from him?

God chose to become a man to restore close friendship with us.⁷ That man was Jesus.

Why was it important for God to become *human*?

1 Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:22-25; Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Colossians 1:13-14; John 3:16, 36; Acts 5:32; Matthew 7:21-27

2 1 Peter 2:9, Colossians 1:16, Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 22:36-38, Matthew 28:18-20, Psalm 43:4, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

3 Romans 7:18-25

4 Romans 10:14

5 Ephesians 2:1-10

6 Genesis 3

7 Luke 19:10, 2 Corinthians 5:18, Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:22

First, to relate to us personally.⁸ **Second**, to experience our joy, pain, and struggle.⁹ **Third**, to bear the punishment for our evil by dying in our place.¹⁰ **And fourth**, to come back to life to wash our evil away, bringing us into close friendship with him and giving us life that won't end.¹¹

Jesus chose to die for us partially to prove that God punishes evil. We don't want a God who lets evil go unpunished. Jesus' death is a guarantee that God won't do this, because he chose to punish himself for our evil, even though he never did anything wrong.

The greater purpose he had was to set us free from our evil desires and transform our hearts so we could live in pure friendship with him.¹² This is what the Bible refers to as being "born again." It means to be totally changed, living free from slavery to our evil desires, in close relationship with God.¹³

That means the good news doesn't stop at Jesus taking our punishment.

The Bible says that after Jesus died, he was raised from the dead and is still alive.¹⁴ He offers us an exchanged life: his perfect life for our broken one.¹⁵ When we accept this incredible offer, his Spirit begins to live inside us and slowly replace our evil desires with a growing desire for his goodness.¹⁶

The process of us being cleaned and perfected is called sanctification.¹⁷ We aren't perfect until after this life is done.¹⁸ However, the process does give practical results right away.

Those results are called the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.¹⁹ If we are Christians, we will be growing in these attributes.²⁰ If we are not, it's time to surrender to God and grow closer to him through reading the Bible, turning away

8 Romans 10:20, Colossians 1:15

9 Hebrews 4:15

10 Romans 6:6

11 Romans 6:5-6, 1 Peter 1:3-4

12 Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20, 5:24

13 1 Peter 1:3-7, 13-25

14 Matthew 26:64, Luke 24, Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 8:1-2

15 Romans 8:10, Galatians 2:20

16 Ephesians 4:17-23

17 Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:30

18 Revelation 2:10, Romans 8:18-30

19 Galatians 5:22-23

20 Matthew 7:17-20

from evil, praying, and worshipping him.

We can't make the fruit of the Spirit grow.²¹ Only the Holy Spirit can as we express our love for Christ.²²

The Bible says we need to take up our cross and follow Jesus.²³ That phrase is a symbol representing the death of our selfishness. **Just as Jesus carried his own cross (a torture tool!), and died hanging on it, we have to do the same symbolically through the death of our selfishness.**²⁴

Why is this important? Because our selfish desires are at war with God's desires.²⁵ Jesus requires complete surrender and trust.²⁶ He asks that we trade our selfish desires for a desire for God.²⁷ This is to show our love.²⁸

When we surrender and choose God as our sole satisfaction, he gives us the strength and desire to obey him.²⁹ It is like letting him be the air we breathe. Breathe in Jesus. Breathe out Jesus. Repeat. Every day. Until the day we die. It is what gives us the courage to trust that when he commands us to treat our enemies with love, he will help us do it.³⁰

Our relationship with Jesus is the closest relationship we can experience because it's inside of us. This relationship has changed my life, and it will change yours too, as you trust and obey God in love. Then, when you fail, he will help you in your failure.³¹

You may be wondering if this sort of life would keep you from enjoying a normal life. I'm happy to report that loving and obeying God has enabled me to enjoy and live life without the burden of feeling like I'm always at war with myself.³²

Even though we're never completely free from evil desires in this life, and we still make mistakes, our love for Jesus starves our evil desires so they lose their strength. God does this so we are free to enjoy him, the world, and the relation-

21 Romans 7:19-25

22 Philippians 1:6

23 Luke 9:23

24 Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 3:5

25 Galatians 5:16-17, 6:8

26 Matthew 16:25, 22:37

27 Deuteronomy 6:5

28 John 14:15

29 Galatians 2:20; Matthew 13:44; Psalm 1:2, 16:11

30 Matthew 5:43-48, Romans 3:22-24

31 Matthew 9:13

32 John 10:10

ships he's given us in purity.³³

The promise that most of us find hard to believe is that God changes our desires.³⁴ He does. It's real.³⁵ Otherwise, the good news wouldn't be good news.

Why don't more Christians live good lives?

Every Christian *could* live free from evil, but there are moments when we refuse to. Sometimes we choose evil over Jesus, even after we become Christians.

Some are kept from experiencing freedom from evil because they don't believe it's possible or that God offers it.³⁶ Others refuse to live free from evil because it's costly. Because it takes total, continued surrender to God.³⁷

What does this mean?

After we surrender to God, we are commanded to *continue* surrendering. This needs to happen constantly because we all tend to revert to selfishness. The Bible calls this tendency the sin nature. We have it from the day we are born until the day we die.³⁸

As we believe and trust God, turn from evil, pray, worship, read the Bible, and engage in community with other Christians, the Spirit of Christ inside us begins to change our desires and give us progressive freedom from the sin nature.³⁹

Growth takes time. Don't lose hope in the process. And don't use the slowness of growth as an excuse to not grow at all.

Honoring God brings lasting joy and peace like nothing in this world. We don't turn from evil simply because evil is bad; we turn from evil to be satisfied by God.⁴⁰

God calls us to join him in working for his glory. After we surrender to him, he inspires us to share this beautiful friendship with others (evangelism) and teach them how to experience it (discipleship).⁴¹

What he gives us is so good that when we experience it, we

33 John 10:11-17

34 Romans 6:1-23, 8:4; Matthew 22:36-40; Galatians 5:15-21; Acts 9:31; Ephesians 2:1-22

35 2 Peter 1:3-11

36 2 Corinthians 3:17, John 8:36, Galatians 5:1, Romans 6:22

37 John 15:1-11

38 1 John 1:8; Romans 3:23, 7:15, 8:7-8; Jeremiah 17:9

39 Ephesians 4:22

40 Zephaniah 3:17, Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 32:11, 33:1, 37:4-8; Philippians 4:4

41 Matthew 28:16-20

can't stop ourselves from sharing about him. Once we taste and see that the Lord is good,⁴² we will naturally want to tell people so that they can feel the freedom and joy we've been given.

Again, here is the good news (the best news!): God promises to love and forgive us, giving us life that won't end, freedom from evil, and close friendship with him as long as we trust and obey him in love. **If we are faithful to the end of our lives, God promises to give us a new body totally free from the curse of evil desires, death, and brokenness, to live with him forever.**⁴³

The bad news is that everyone who rejects God's offer will suffer the endless punishment and separation from God that we all earned through our evil.⁴⁴

The good news of God and the bad news of what happens when we reject him make the Gospel the most important truth in our lives.

We exist to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. We often think we have to choose between a life of pleasing ourselves and a life of pleasing God. The truth is that giving into evil desires does not please us for very long. Indulging in evil leads to depression, a broken sense of self-worth, and addiction to destructive, evil behaviors.⁴⁵ Evil rules us, bleeds our joy, and leaves us hollow and alone. It makes us *slaves*.⁴⁶

When we choose to view ourselves as willing slaves to God's goodness instead of slaves to evil, the presence of God in our lives and the great gifts he's promised us in the Gospel give us joy and freedom that nothing can take away.⁴⁷

All it takes is everything.

The easiest way to remember this is through *The Salvation Poem*:

Jesus, You died upon a cross
And rose again to save the lost
Forgive me now of all my sin
Come be my Savior, Lord, and Friend
Change my life and make it new
And help me, Lord, to live for You

42 Psalm 34:8

43 Revelation 21:3-4, 22:3-5

44 Luke 12:5, Mark 9:45, Ephesians 2:3

45 Romans 7:5, 8:6

46 Romans 6:17

47 1 Thessalonians 1:6

DIG DEEPER

Read John chapter 17, which is a record of a prayer Jesus prayed for you and me directly before dying. Try writing down any details you find interesting about what Jesus said, then read and discuss your questions with another Christian. What do you think about Jesus praying for you, on a personal level?

CHAPTER 2

JESUS, YOU DIED UPON A CROSS



Why did Jesus have to die on a cross?

Without answering that question, God's good news doesn't make sense.

The only way to understand why is to listen to God's answer. **God says he willingly chose to experience our lives firsthand and then die for us so we could be free from sin, so we could be reconciled to him, and so he could win our love and dedication.**⁴⁸

Why did he have to do it the way he did? Because he *chose* to.

God says that life is in the blood.⁴⁹ Forgiveness is only possible when pure blood is shed,⁵⁰ and only pure blood can give endless life because it's not under the curse of death. That is why Jesus, the only truly pure man,⁵¹ willingly chose to die for us.

God promised throughout history that he would die for us. When Jesus lived, God's promises needed to be fulfilled or he would be made a liar. So Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies written long before he was born.

Let's look through a list of some of the most important accomplishments Jesus achieved by choosing to die.

1. He died to bring us to God.⁵²
2. His Spirit brought us life. As we die to our evil, we are made alive by his Spirit.⁵³
3. He was beaten for our sin, and his punishment brings us peace and healing.⁵⁴

48 John 3:16

49 Leviticus 17:11

50 Ephesians 2:13, 1 John 1:7, Hebrews 9:22

51 1 Peter 1:18-19, 2 Corinthians 5:21

52 John 12:32, 14:6; Luke 19:10

53 1 Peter 3:18

54 Isaiah 53:1-12

4. His obedience fulfilled prophecy.⁵⁵
5. He paid our debt to God when he was nailed to the cross, satisfying God's justness.⁵⁶
6. He was forsaken so we could be welcomed.⁵⁷
7. He laid down his life voluntarily so we could take his life. This is how he offers an exchanged life—his for ours.⁵⁸
8. He set an example of the servitude and selflessness he calls us to, purifying the world.⁵⁹
9. He took our curse by being hung on a tree so we could be free from the curse of slavery to evil.⁶⁰
10. He became the last Adam. Adam, the first man created, was born without evil desires, but his evil actions brought death to the world. Jesus, the last Adam, was born without evil desires, but his sinless, voluntary death brought life to the world.⁶¹
11. He is the beginning and the end, so all of life is filtered through him.⁶²
12. He tasted death so we could taste life. Though he didn't need to, he experienced everything to show that he has authority over everything.⁶³
13. He was the greatest servant, laying down his life for people who hated him. In this, he shows his love more deeply than any other action could.⁶⁴
14. His perfect blood cures our sickness and gives us life that won't end.⁶⁵

What a remarkable set of accomplishments and promises! What do they mean for us?

God says that when we trust Jesus died and accomplished everything for us, we get to experience the rewards he earned.⁶⁶ Jesus took our curse so we would be set free from

55 John 5:30, 12:49; Isaiah 53; 1 John 5:3; Matthew 26:36-42

56 1 John 2:2, Colossians 2:14

57 Matthew 27:46

58 Acts 2:24-36; John 17:1-5, 22

59 Matthew 20:28

60 Galatians 3:13-14

61 1 Corinthians 15:22, Genesis 3:1-23

62 Revelation 22:13

63 John 3:16, Hebrews 2:14

64 Matthew 20:28, John 15:13

65 John 6:53, 17:1-5; Leviticus 17:11

66 John 20:31

the curse of evil.⁶⁷ This promise gives us confidence that as we find our life and joy in him, he gives us strength to love and obey him instead of indulging in evil.⁶⁸

We don't have to feel hopeless when we look at bad habits we haven't previously been able to kick. Jesus said he paid our debt so God could view us as pure.⁶⁹ This promise gives us confidence that nothing can keep us from him.⁷⁰

We are saved by God's grace not by what we do, so we can't take pride in our own abilities.⁷¹ **Still, a change in our lives is what confirms that our trust in God and love for him is real.**⁷² For example, if a man says he loves his wife but he doesn't put her first and treat her with love, he is proving that he doesn't really love her. His lifestyle makes his words meaningless even if he feels great affection for her.

Our trust in who God is and what he promises gives us the reasons and strength we need to live the life he demands from us.⁷³ The Bible says that this happens through the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is our guarantee (proof) that we belong to Jesus and are considered righteous because of his sacrifice.⁷⁴

Our trust in Jesus gives us the strength to prove who we are as Christians by living a pure life. This doesn't mean we will be perfect,⁷⁵ but if we are Christians, God will be perfecting us.⁷⁶

And if we remain faithful, we will be made totally perfect in the next life.⁷⁷

Jesus said we are like branches on a grapevine. When we become his, we begin to tap into his life like a branch on a vine. His roots give us food and help us grow as God continues pruning us so we bear good fruit.⁷⁸

If our lives are changed by God's Spirit through our trust in Jesus' life and death for us, then the change in our lives is proof

67 Galatians 3:13

68 1 John 5:2

69 Romans 4:25

70 Romans 8:38-39

71 Ephesians 2:8-9

72 James 2:20-22

73 Galatians 2:20

74 Ephesians 1:13-14

75 1 John 1:8

76 1 Thessalonians 5:23

77 Revelation 21:1-8

78 John 15:1-17

that our belief is real.⁷⁹ These promises give us confidence that what he accomplished by his death is ours.

We are not saved by the fruit of the Spirit. If we practice self-control and have peace, that is not what saves us. But we should question if we're true Christians if we live a fruitless life.⁸⁰

His blood is the water, and our lives are the branches.
Spend time in the light of the son to grow strong and mature.

DIG DEEPER

Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, a section of prophecy written roughly 700 years before Jesus lived. Then read John 19:16-42. Write down your thoughts and questions about these sections and share with another Christian. How does the idea that Jesus died to heal you impact you emotionally?

⁷⁹ John 14:15; Romans 1:17, 3:10

⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 13:5, James 2:14-26

CHAPTER 3

AND ROSE AGAIN TO SAVE THE LOST



Even more central to our hope is knowing that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive forever. If Jesus were still dead, we could not experience his life. Yet him living inside us is one of the greatest gifts he offers.⁸¹

Life with God is made possible in part because his death made us clean in his eyes, but it is made *real* by him rising from the dead and living forever in heaven and *in us*.⁸² This is how we are promised to live forever after we die, because we will be stripped of our broken life and left with only his never-ending life.⁸³

Jesus is truly God, and truly a man. Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, were made to live forever, but their evil decisions killed them.⁸⁴ Evil is what will kill us too.⁸⁵ Evil is why we all die,⁸⁶ but Jesus lives forever because he never did anything evil.⁸⁷ This shows he was God⁸⁸ because only God is perfect.⁸⁹

Even though Jesus died, evil didn't kill him.⁹⁰ He voluntarily gave up his life,⁹¹ and death couldn't hold him because he never messed up.⁹² His purity gave him the right to take his life back.⁹³

So, that's what he did.

Jesus came back to life to show his power, divinity, perfect humanity, and ability to give us life and bring us back

81 1 Corinthians 15:13-14

82 1 Corinthians 1:30, 15:17; 2 Timothy 1:9

83 1 Corinthians 15:53, 2 Corinthians 5:4

84 Genesis 2:16-17

85 Romans 6:23

86 Romans 3:23

87 1 Peter 2:22

88 John 1:1, 10:30

89 Luke 18:19

90 Hebrews 4:15, 2 Corinthians 5:21

91 John 19:30

92 Acts 2:24

93 John 10:18

from the dead.⁹⁴ But more than that, he came back so we could live in close friendship with him forever.

Let's think about this for a bit.

We don't ever have to be lonely because he lives inside us.⁹⁵ We have access to him every moment of every day.⁹⁶ We can pray to him and feel his emotions stir in our hearts.⁹⁷ He knows our thoughts and loves us.⁹⁸ He gives us power to live pure.⁹⁹ We can live in his love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹⁰⁰ He offers us life to the fullest, when we find our life in him.¹⁰¹

The Bible says that our reason for existing is to live in close relationship with Jesus.¹⁰² To live closer to him than to any other person on the planet. To love him more than anything or anyone else.¹⁰³ And to gladly obey and worship him forever.¹⁰⁴

Because we exist to love Jesus and live with him, the Bible calls Christians "the bride of Christ."¹⁰⁵ The Bible also says that anyone who denies him stands condemned.¹⁰⁶ Our destination is the arms of Jesus.¹⁰⁷ No one who hates Jesus will end up in his arms; instead, they will be separated from him forever.¹⁰⁸

This is a horror few can imagine. Not many realize that any life or joy we have comes from God.¹⁰⁹ In life, we have access to simple pleasures because he has made them available to us. When we die, all of that will be stripped away, and either we will be left with Jesus and endless joy, or with the horror of separation and agony.¹¹⁰

We begin to see that the arms of Jesus is the greatest destination in the universe. The fact that we can experience peace and

94 Romans 8:10-11

95 Romans 8:9

96 Hebrews 9:24

97 Colossians 3:15

98 Psalm 4:3

99 1 John 2:10

100 Galatians 5:22-23

101 John 10:10

102 Colossians 3:4

103 Matthew 10:37

104 Revelation 22:3

105 Revelation 19:7, 21:2

106 Jude 4-7

107 Luke 23:43, Revelation 21:2

108 1 John 2:22, Matthew 23:33

109 Acts 17:28, James 1:17

110 Luke 13:28

life with him now is the greatest pleasure in life.¹¹¹ Any person who has lived in real closeness with Jesus will tell you he is better than drugs, success, money, sex, friendship—everything.¹¹²

At first, letting him into our souls feels terrifying because he exposes our evil and pushes us to surrender.¹¹³ But as we surrender, he brings sweet healing and gives us strength to endure and grow.¹¹⁴

If you pursue Jesus and surrender to him, he will become your greatest pleasure, and he will change your life and purify you.¹¹⁵

Then, after you die, you will fall into the paradise of his arms.

DIG DEEPER

Read Romans 1:1-7, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, and Romans 10:9-10. These are details about the resurrection after the resurrection happened. Then read Daniel 12:2, Job 19:23-27, Isaiah 26:19-21, Hosea 6:1-2, Numbers 21:9 (also read John 3:14-15 to make sense of this reference), Psalm 16:9-10, and Psalm 71:19-24. These are details about the resurrection of Jesus and those who die faithful to him, written long before Jesus walked the earth. Write down what Jesus' resurrection means to you, and why you think him being raised from the dead is important. If you have questions, talk through them with another Christian.

111 John 15:1-11

112 Colossians 3:1-5

113 John 3:19

114 Luke 1:79

115 John 15:11, Nehemiah 8:10, Philippians 4:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10



CHAPTER 4

FORGIVE ME NOW OF ALL MY SIN

When we talked about what Jesus accomplished by dying, we saw that trusting his claims about himself gives us access to his promises, but for his promises to become real in our lives, we also need a change in attitude and behavior.¹¹⁶

Change begins with reading and trusting what he says about *himself*, and what he says about *us*.¹¹⁷ **Here are some examples of what Jesus says about himself in contrast to what he says about us.**

1. Jesus is entirely good.¹¹⁸ We are filled with evil.¹¹⁹
2. Jesus loved us.¹²⁰ We hated him.¹²¹
3. Jesus chose us.¹²² We rejected him.¹²³
4. Jesus obeyed God perfectly.¹²⁴ We rebelled against God's rules.¹²⁵
5. Jesus willingly suffered for his enemies, including us.¹²⁶ We've been unwilling to suffer even for our loved ones.¹²⁷
6. Jesus was the greatest servant.¹²⁸ We don't want to serve but to be served.¹²⁹
7. Jesus rose from the dead.¹³⁰ We are destined to fall into

116 2 Corinthians 7:10

117 Luke 5:32

118 1 Peter 2:22

119 Jeremiah 17:9-10

120 Romans 5:8

121 Romans 5:10-12

122 1 Peter 2:9

123 Mark 12:10

124 Hebrews 4:15, Philippians 2:8

125 Romans 3:23

126 Hebrews 2:9

127 John 15:13

128 Matthew 20:20-28

129 Psalm 119:36

130 1 Thessalonians 4:14

our graves.¹³¹

Jesus is God, yet still truly human.¹³² He is the greatest man to ever live, and he chose to love us and to pursue our love while we were his enemies.¹³³

No one can be changed by Jesus without approaching him with humility.¹³⁴ Jesus isn't a magic spell.¹³⁵ He's a person who knows every thought in our minds.¹³⁶

The Bible says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.¹³⁷ If we approach Jesus wanting to use him as a cosmic butler, we will never be welcomed by him.¹³⁸ **Unless we turn from our evil and begin to hate it, and choose his good instead, we will never know him or the benefit of his promises.**

This attitude of regret over evil, coupled with passionate desire for Jesus' goodness—and firm trust in his promises—becomes our new normal. When we read what he says in the Bible, then pray and seek his will, our attitudes change from prideful to humble. We start to become like him.

Asking Jesus to forgive us isn't enough. He sees our hearts. We need to grow to hate evil and to desire his goodness to replace it.

When we approach him with real humility, he meets us in our brokenness and begins to mend our hearts. **It is when we see ourselves honestly, and live our lives in agreement with the truth that God has chosen to love and grow us into his goodness, that God gives us life, joy, and love.**¹³⁹

Isn't it beautiful how he involves us in the process?

If you feel ashamed of your evil, good! Run to him. Kneel in humility and thank him for showing you the truth about yourself. It is proof that Jesus is pursuing you with love.¹⁴⁰

Turn from your evil, and instead turn to Jesus. Bury yourself

131 Genesis 3:19

132 Luke 2:7, John 19:28, Hebrews 2:9

133 Romans 5:10

134 James 4:6

135 Acts 8:9-24

136 Jeremiah 17:10, Psalm 139:4

137 James 4:6

138 Acts 8:9-24

139 1 John 1:5-7

140 Luke 15:11-32, Hebrews 12:6, Psalm 119:75, Revelation 3:19

in the Bible.¹⁴¹ Immerse yourself in prayer.¹⁴² Meditate on who Jesus is, and what he promises to do in and through you.¹⁴³ Submit to him so you can please him and live in close friendship with him.¹⁴⁴ Remember that his love and promises are what give you the power and authority to live a pure life.

This is a constant, daily process. When you fail, don't get trapped by guilt or a sense of hopelessness. **The moment you fail is the moment you need to turn to God the most.**¹⁴⁵ The idea that your evil is more powerful than God is ridiculous and prideful. Jesus loved you when you hated him. Of course he will forgive you now that you are his child! He is stronger than your evil, and he loves you more than you dislike yourself.¹⁴⁶ Trust that and you won't lose hope.

DIG DEEPER

Read 1 John 1, Ephesians 5:8, and John 11:9-10, then write down your understanding of forgiveness and what it means to "walk in the light." Pray about it, then discuss honestly with a trusted Christian friend. Are you walking in the light? If not, what change can you make today to step into the light?

141 Psalm 119

142 Nehemiah 1:11

143 Daniel 9:3

144 Deuteronomy 28:9, Romans 12:2

145 Psalm 32:5-6

146 Psalm 103:12



CHAPTER 5

COME BE MY SAVIOR, LORD, AND FRIEND

When we turn to God and away from evil, he begins to absorb our life. He becomes our obsession. Our life. Our joy. He changes our view of life. The Bible refers to this process as renewing our mind.¹⁴⁷

Three primary ways the Bible illustrates this change is by referring to a few different roles Jesus fills: Savior, Lord, and friend.

The Bible is very careful to show us that Jesus was a human both before he died and after. He called his disciples and the people who loved him “friends.”¹⁴⁸

After Jesus rose from the dead, he didn’t show the people who killed him how wrong they’d been. Instead, he made his friends breakfast, then walked with them, and joined them for dinner. In another account, he appeared to his friends in a home, showed them his scars, and ate with them.

He wanted to show that his primary purpose in coming to earth was relational.¹⁴⁹

The God of everything calls me his friend. He serves and loves me, as I serve and love him. He lives inside me in unbroken friendship. We love and respect each other.

If you don’t believe what he says about himself, you won’t love him, and you won’t experience his love and power in your life because you can’t love someone you don’t know and trust. If you don’t believe he lived a perfect life and died to deliver you from your sin, you will never turn away from your own evil.¹⁵⁰

Of course, for us to experience his friendship, he needs to deliver us from evil and become the center of our lives. As our Savior, he continually forgives us and sets us free. We’ve

147 Psalm 51:10, Ezekiel 36:26, Romans 12:2, Hebrews 10:16

148 John 15:15, Romans 5:8-11

149 Luke 19:10

150 John 14:15

covered that in previous chapters.

What about Jesus as Lord?¹⁵¹

A lord is someone who directs with authority. He says, “do this,” and his servants obey.¹⁵² The Bible says he demands to be our Lord.¹⁵³ It’s a pre-requisite to living in friendship with him.¹⁵⁴

Don’t get confused. He doesn’t want us to grit our teeth and obey. Through the years, God has been angry with a lot of people who gritted their teeth and obeyed.¹⁵⁵ Instead, God wants people to obey him because they *want* to please him.¹⁵⁶ **He wants us to give him our lives out of real love and trust, rather than because we have to.**¹⁵⁷

If you don’t *want* to obey him and give him your life, immerse yourself in his Word (the Bible), and think about who he is, who he says you are, and what he’s done for you. Then, actively *pursue* your desire of him.¹⁵⁸

Here’s a real-life example of how to pursue desire for someone. When lovers are married, they don’t always feel affection for each other. But when they treat each other with kindness, their affection for each other grows.

A wife gets her husband a gift, and while putting the gift together, she remembers his kindness. The simple act of planning, buying, and filling out the card helps her pursue her affection for him because as she remembers who he is and responds to it, affection rises in her heart and becomes real through her belief in him.

When we remind ourselves of who Jesus is and think about his goodness toward us, affection rises in our hearts and becomes real. In response, he changes our desires, and gives us the strength to obey him out of love and trust in who he is.¹⁵⁹

For God’s promises to become real in our lives, we need to pursue our affection for him through reading his Word, praying, and trusting and obeying his commands. All of that changes our mindset as we grow to desire him as our Savior, Lord, and friend.

These processes matter because God uses them to change

151 John 13:13

152 Luke 6:46

153 Romans 10:9-13, Philippians 2:11

154 Matthew 7:21

155 Hosea 6:6, Psalm 40:6

156 2 Corinthians 5:9, 9:7; Romans 12:1

157 John 7:17

158 Psalm 63:1

159 Hebrews 11:6

who we are. **He reforms our identity through our trust in his identity as our Savior, Lord, and friend.**

DIG DEEPER

Read Colossians 1:15-23 and write down a list of people you love who haven't heard why you decided to follow Jesus and call him Savior, Lord, and friend. Pray that God would open their hearts and give you an opportunity to share your story of how God has changed your life. Is he giving you opportunities that you've just not taken?



CHAPTER 6

CHANGE MY LIFE AND MAKE IT NEW

If you have begun your journey with Christ, trust that he is with you because you will soon be discouraged.¹⁶⁰

When you get discouraged, remember God is more powerful than everything—including your weakness.¹⁶¹ Trust he is changing your life and making you new.¹⁶²

When we fail and are tempted to believe we are hopeless, we remind ourselves that we grow not because we are good (we aren't), but because Christ works inside us through our trust in him and through our attempts to love, honor, and obey him.¹⁶³

Is Christ powerful enough to keep us from an evil decision right now? Of course he is!¹⁶⁴ Every good thing in our lives comes from him. **Our good behavior is powered by him as he works through our belief, love, and effort.**¹⁶⁵

And is he faithful to keep you from evil? Beyond any doubt!¹⁶⁶

So, why do we feel so incapable? Because he lets us feel weak so that we rely on him.¹⁶⁷ Don't let your weakness fool you. Instead, let it be the reason you trust God to be your strength.¹⁶⁸

So, what steals our trust in God? **When we suddenly doubt we have the strength to obey, what changed?**

We forgot who God is.¹⁶⁹ We forgot who we are in him.¹⁷⁰ We wavered in our trust that he is powerful enough to keep us from choosing evil.¹⁷¹ And, truly, we let our hearts wander from him to

160 John 16:33

161 Psalm 43:5

162 Psalm 42:1

163 Ephesians 2:10, Hebrews 9:14

164 Jude 24

165 Psalm 119:9

166 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Peter 4:19

167 2 Corinthians 12:10, Ephesians 6:10

168 Hebrews 10:23

169 Deuteronomy 4:23

170 Romans 8

171 Galatians 1:6

other things.¹⁷²

That last mistake is the sneakiest and most damaging. **Every evil mistake starts with letting our hearts wander from Christ.**¹⁷³ This is why it is so important to develop a diligent habit of reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping every day. Because we are easily distracted and our memories are short.¹⁷⁴

We can't ever forget that God is our life.¹⁷⁵ *The Salvation Poem* uses the wording, "Change my life and make it new." It acknowledges that our lives are never going to be the same after knowing Christ, and the reason is one hundred percent because of who he is.

Do you have a friend or family member that you love like crazy? Why do you love them? Is it because you're a good person?

If someone asked me if I loved my wife because I'm a good person, I'd be confused and a little offended. I love her because she's wonderful! My love for her has nothing to do with whether I'm good. In fact, I know I'm not good, and I love her more because she loves me despite my lack of goodness.

Our love for Jesus is like that. It has nothing to do with how good we are. We love him because he is wonderful.¹⁷⁶ **Every day, we should think about his wonderful traits until we feel love for him fill up our bones.**

Three habits that cultivate this are reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping.

Do you doubt this works?

Read God's promises that he will never leave you or forsake you.¹⁷⁷ That he will complete the good work he began in you.¹⁷⁸ That he loved you when you hated him and he chose you to be his.¹⁷⁹ That nothing can separate you from his love except your own distrust and willful evil, and that he has forgiven and accepted you.¹⁸⁰

When you doubt he is renewing your mind, remind yourself that he does so through his Word.¹⁸¹ When you doubt you have

172 1 Corinthians 10:14, James 1:14

173 John 14:15

174 James 1:22-25, Hebrews 4:16

175 John 17:3

176 1 Peter 2:9, Hebrews 13:20-21, 1 John 4:10

177 Hebrews 13:5

178 Philippians 1:6

179 1 John 4:19, Romans 5:10, Isaiah 49:16

180 Romans 8:31-39, Isaiah 59:2, Hebrews 10:26-31, 1 John 1:9

181 Ephesians 4:20-24

the power to deny evil, remind yourself of times he has given you the strength to overcome evil in the past.¹⁸² When you doubt you can love him,¹⁸³ remind yourself that he is too wonderful not to love.¹⁸⁴ When you doubt you can do anything good, remind yourself that every good thing in your life comes from him.¹⁸⁵

Walk in humility, love, and practical obedience to Christ by believing he is changing you and constantly making you new.¹⁸⁶

God's Spirit lives inside us, lovingly changing us in ways we may hardly notice. **We share his life like an unborn baby shares its mother's blood.** The baby and mother remain separate people, but their lives get blended together in a beautiful way. In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives life to our spirits through the blood of Jesus.¹⁸⁷

His Spirit is what we feel inside us when we pray and worship him. The sense of his Spirit living in us is a vital daily experience.¹⁸⁸ Without a constant sense of his Spirit living in us, we are weak. **But with him, his Spirit makes us strong like nothing else can.**¹⁸⁹

DIG DEEPER

Read Romans 12:1-23. This passage shows the change in our lives that comes when we surrender our lives to God in real faith. It gives a glimpse of what spiritual renewal looks and feels like. Write down and share how God is renewing you. Where is he working most right now? Reflect on how he is patiently walking you down the path of growth and maturity. Can you see proof that he has been gracious toward you?

182 Deuteronomy 31:6, 2 Thessalonians 3:3

183 Luke 7:47

184 Isaiah 9:6, John 1:14, Revelation 1:14-15

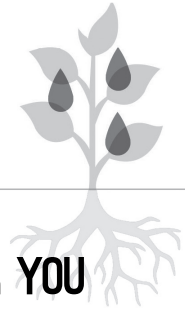
185 James 1:17

186 Isaiah 43:19, 1 Corinthians 6:20, Romans 12:1

187 John 3:6-8, Romans 8:16, Galatians 4:6

188 Luke 24:45-49, Acts 2:1-5, Romans 8:2-6

189 John 3:5-6, Acts 2:38, Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 8:11



CHAPTER 7

AND HELP ME, LORD, TO LIVE FOR YOU

God gives effective tools in our fight to live for him.¹⁹⁰ Without using them, we will fail.

Life is complicated. Christianity is not a faith where you walk blindly through a bubble-wrapped square room.¹⁹¹ **Instead, God has set our hearts on fire and told us to display that flame in the darkness we were born into.**¹⁹² He tells us to live our real lives different from how the world expects us to.¹⁹³

When we are born again, we need constant nourishment for the rest of our lives. We eat multiple times per day. We sleep so many hours per day. We drink so much water per day. **The spiritual counterparts of food, water, and sleep, are reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping him with others.**

The world is dirty.¹⁹⁴ We are required to be pure.¹⁹⁵ While living, we will have dirt thrown on our hearts every day.¹⁹⁶ Through our eyes, we see perversion. Through our ears, we hear cursing. Through our hands, we feel the pain of thorns and the fists of friends. Through our tongues, we taste bitter poison. Through our noses, we smell the rot of death.¹⁹⁷

What tools does God give us to wash away the dirt, push back the dark, and change the world around us?

First, as we've already discussed, he revealed his plan for our lives in the Bible.¹⁹⁸ By reading the text of the Bible and treasuring God's promises inside, we have our minds cleansed and our

190 Ephesians 6:11-20

191 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

192 Matthew 5:13-16

193 1 Timothy 2:1-15

194 Ephesians 5:11

195 Romans 13:12

196 James 4:4

197 1 John 2:16, 2 Peter 1:4

198 2 Timothy 3:16

hearts strengthened.¹⁹⁹

Second, he has put the Holy Spirit inside us, so we can pray to God and feel him respond to us.²⁰⁰ This deepens our conviction and gives us power to live different and help change the world.²⁰¹

Third, he made us for worship.²⁰² When we worship him, he satisfies our desires, and begins to heal the wounds this world gives us.²⁰³

Fourth, he made us to enjoy and love people, animals, and the world he's given us within boundaries.²⁰⁴ We need to prioritize being with other people and enjoying the natural world.²⁰⁵

We need to prioritize spending time with other people who believe in God and love him the way we do.²⁰⁶ This encourages and strengthens us. It keeps us from getting unbalanced.²⁰⁷ This is called *church*. **Church isn't a building we meet in, or a service we attend; church is the people who love both God and us.**²⁰⁸ Spending time with other people who love God (reading the Bible, praying, worshiping, and helping each other live how he tells us to live in the Bible) is vital.

For a long time, I wondered whether meeting with other Christians was important. But the Bible says it's the whole point.²⁰⁹ Jesus rose again to build a loving community: one that's purified in him and satisfied by him.²¹⁰ He illustrated this in his behavior after rising from the dead when he ate with his friends, walked with them, and visited them in their private rooms.

If that's not enough for us, this provocative story a priest told me might help:

One day, a man came to a priest and said, "Father, my brother, Paul, has cut himself off from me and every other Christian. You need to go talk to him and convince him he needs to return!"

The priest went to Paul's house, knocked on the door,

199 Romans 15:4, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 119:105

200 John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 12:7, Jude 20, Romans 8:26

201 Matthew 28:18-20

202 1 Chronicles 16:23-31, Revelation 4:8-12

203 Psalm 100, Nehemiah 9:5-6, Hebrews 12:28-29

204 Ecclesiastes 5:18, 11:9; 1 Corinthians 10:31

205 Exodus 23:12, 31:17; Romans 15:32, 2 Timothy 1:16

206 Acts 2:46

207 Hebrews 10:25

208 Matthew 16:18

209 2 Corinthians 5:19, Hebrews 10:25

210 1 John 1:7

and was told to enter.

Once inside, he found Paul staring at a roaring fire. They nodded silent greetings, and the priest sat next to Paul and stared at the fire. After a moment, the priest picked up metal tongs, grabbed a white-hot coal from the fire, and placed it on the stone floor just outside the fire. He nodded at Paul, smiled, and waited. After a few minutes, the coal cooled so much that it had no fire left.

The priest nodded at Paul, picked up the coal, and tossed it back in the fire. After a few moments, the coal was burning again. The priest laughed, nodded one last time at Paul, and got up to leave.

We are that coal. **Without the burning fire of others around us, we will eventually cool down and lose our fire.**²¹¹ We need to read our Bibles, develop a diligent daily habit of prayer and worship, and prioritize spending time with other Christians, so we help each other live joyfully obedient to God.

If we do this, God will strengthen, encourage, and bless us. Then he will give us opportunities to share the Gospel with people who need it as badly as we do.

DIG DEEPER

Read Galatians 5:22-26, Psalm 121:1-8, and 1 Corinthians 12:20 - 13:13. Is it clear to you how God wants us to live? Pray for God to give you the strength to live out the love you read about in these verses. What's one way you can begin to put this sort of love into practice? Write it down, then go and do it!

211 Matthew 18:20



CHAPTER 8

TIPS ON READING THE BIBLE

The Bible is called the Word of God because it is God's way of explaining who he is, who we are, where we came from, and why we exist. It is complex. If we open our Bibles to a random spot and start reading, we will probably be confused. This is because the Bible is actually 66 separate books written by different authors over a period of more than 3,000 years.

The books of the Bible were inspired by God. Beyond that, God confirmed that the contents of the books are true, and they are from him. Many of the books were intended for very specific people groups. The early church collected and arranged these books into a single volume that we now call the Bible. **Together, they show how God interacted with man throughout history.**

The books of the Bible are written in different genres. The book of Psalms, for example, is a book of songs and prayers. It is filled with metaphors that are not always meant to be taken literally. The Gospel of John, however, is a historical work based on the life of Jesus.

The Epistles, like Galatians and Ephesians, were letters written by early church leaders to specific people groups.

There are books of prophecy, like Isaiah and the book of Revelation—a long, complex prophecy that was originally written for the early Christian church.

There's more, but I think we get the point.

The Bible is also split up into two testaments. The Old Testament is made up of books written before the birth of Jesus and the New Testament contains books written after the birth of Jesus.

The first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) were written by and for the Israelites to explain the beginning of the world, God's promises to them, and how he formed them as a nation.

There are different agreements between God and people throughout the Bible. These are called *covenants*. Today we live

under the covenant of Jesus. That means that we are not required to follow the ceremonial laws detailed in books like Leviticus or Deuteronomy, which were under one of God's old covenants with the Jewish people. The ceremonial laws worked as symbols pointing to Jesus, so the ceremonial laws were completed by his life and death.

If your head is spinning, take a moment and breathe. **Then be encouraged because you don't need to understand it all right now!**

The Bible is not something you *have* to read, like a duty. It's something you *get* to read. It is intended to be a joy—read, studied, and lived out over a lifetime. It is a treasure that will transform your mind and heart.

Some sections of the Bible are easier to understand than others. I suggest you begin by reading the book of Genesis (the first book in the Bible), and at least one of the four Gospels (Mathew, Mark, Luke, or John).

From there, it might make sense to move on to Exodus, along with the Book of Acts, and the Epistles in the New Testament.

Romans and Hebrews are two books that are difficult to read, yet they help make sense of the difference between the new covenant of Jesus and the old covenants in the Old Testament.

There are many fascinating stories in the Bible. There are also sections of dry lineages and complicated laws for Jewish people. **You can be certain, however, that every bit of the Bible has a good purpose and is worthwhile to study because the Bible helps us understand who we are, who he is, and how to live.** It keeps us from evil. So, that's why you should be wary of anything that consistently keeps you from reading your Bible. Your phone, video games, etc.

If you don't have a Bible, you should purchase one. Some good translations that are fairly easy to read are the ESV, the NIV, and the NLT. If you have a smartphone, you can download several different Bible apps, and read the Bible for free. Or read the Bible on BibleGateway.com.

The best Bible app for a smartphone is the YouVersion Bible app. It offers the largest array of translations, audio Bibles, yearly reading plans, and devotionals to help you get started. If you start out trying to read the entire Bible without a plan, you may get overwhelmed.

There are plans for reading the whole Bible in a year, and these are helpful because they get you to read little parts every day. If you want to read a lot, go ahead. But it is better to focus on

learning to savor God’s Word. It’s a constant source of encouragement and wisdom, and your ability to live out the Christian life is directly tied to how consistently you engage the Bible with your heart and mind.

Ask God to help you understand the Bible. Ask him to help you apply his commands to your daily life. Don’t neglect reading and listening to it. Don’t let yourself forget it. You may not think you are a reader, but the Bible will quickly become your most treasured possession because it is the words of God to you.

One easy way to start reading, if you haven’t already, is to go back through this book and read the references and the recommended Bible sections at the end of each chapter. After you do that, you should get a Study Bible that has a solid commentary. I use the ESV Study Bible and find the commentary and historical information very helpful.

DIG DEEPER

Get a Bible, find a “read the Bible in one year” plan, and start following that reading plan.



CHAPTER 9

TIPS ON DEVELOPING A DAILY PRAYER HABIT

Prayer is talking to God.

Jesus modeled a simple example of this in what's called "the Lord's Prayer," in Matthew 6:9-13. This prayer was an answer to one of his friends asking how to pray.

Yet there are different types of prayer like there are different types of conversations with friends. We can pray for other people. We can pray for ourselves. We can ask for protection, healing, strength, and wisdom. We can thank God for his goodness, mercy, and forgiveness. We can tell him about what we love. We can thank him for what he's given us. Or tell him our cares, fears, doubts, and questions.

All of this is good!

God cares that you pray honestly. He knows your thoughts. Pray with your whole heart. Approach him with humility, thankfulness, and confidence.

Pray with hands raised, in your lap, or folded. Pray with your eyes open or closed. Walk, stand, sit, bow, or lie down. Pray in the morning, or evening, or afternoon, or all day.

Don't try to sound profound. God isn't impressed with fancy words. He knows more than you do. Just be genuine. Be yourself and talk to God with respect. Trust that he wants to listen to your prayers, and that he actually loves to be with you.

Pray by yourself and pray with others. Praying together is important! It brings us together and it pleases God.

Don't be intimidated by other people who are more comfortable praying out loud. Prayer isn't about us. It's about growing closer to God as we express our hearts to him. If someone makes you feel silly for how you pray, that says a lot more about them than about you. It shows arrogance, and arrogance is evil.

Every Christian should develop a diligent prayer habit. This means scheduling a time every day to pray. If you don't do that, prayer has a way of disappearing from your life. If you don't practice scheduled prayer, consider starting with a fifteen-minute

chunk of time. Scheduling your time in the early morning, before you start your day, is recommended. It tends to be more helpful than when you schedule time at night because you might be tired, busy, or distracted. Prayer has a way of changing the course of your day in a good way.

Split your prayer time into different sections. You will probably find it helpful to write down a prayer plan so you have something to look at if you have a hard time thinking of anything to pray about.

Here's one suggested structure: first, confess any mistakes you've made, and ask God for forgiveness. Then spend a few minutes thanking him for his goodness, forgiveness, gentleness, and love. Take a few more minutes to praise him for his faithfulness and power. Pray for your family and friends. Be silent for a while, waiting for God to speak to you. Then spend any remaining time praying for God to strengthen you for your day.

You can also use the Bible as a prayer guide. For instance, read the Bible, then talk with God about what you read, and ask him to help you understand what you found confusing.

Good habits take time to grow. Be patient with the process. Be patient with yourself. Just don't be lazy.

After being diligent to spend fifteen minutes in prayer each day, many people find that they want to lengthen the amount of prayer time. This is wonderful! I've found it remains helpful to split up the time into different focuses. It keeps me from getting overwhelmed or frustrated.

Prayer is intentional. Like love, it must be active to be real.

There is another tool I've found helpful that I'll call a "prayer clock." It represents a single hour of prayer in five minute chunks. Every five minutes, the prayer clock suggests another focus for your prayer time. If you can only make it through one or two sections of the prayer clock, that is alright. If you don't find the tool helpful, don't use it. But if you think the idea sounds intriguing, I have supplied a prayer clock below.

You may be surprised, if you commit to trying it, that praying for a single hour is not only possible, it's enjoyable! That's because we need prayer. We long for close relationship with God more than anything else. And that intimate relationship changes us.

God calls us to prayer. He longs for us to speak with him. Talking with God satisfies our souls in a way nothing else can. When we neglect prayer, we neglect ourselves and the people we love. Let's spend time with God, letting him strengthen and en-

courage us daily!

He loves satisfying and delighting us. He wants to be with you, so that you can get to know and enjoy him.

Schedule time with God in your day, or your day will crowd him out. If you neglect to pray, you'll find yourself discouraged, lonely, and falling into evil. But if you are faithful to pray diligently, God will reward you more deeply than you could imagine.

Did you know God prays for *you*?²¹²

DIG DEEPER

Pray in the following ways for five minutes each: praise; confession; read a Psalm; thanksgiving; worship; wait for him to speak to you; share your requests with God; pray for others; pray through Psalm 23, or another Psalm that lends itself toward being prayed; meditate on who God is; ask him to strengthen you to be like him; then end with more praise.

To download a printable prayer clock, go to: thesalvationpoem.com/prayerclock

212 Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:26, 34; 1 John 2:1



CHAPTER 10

TIPS ON JOINING AND STAYING IN A CHURCH

The Church is anyone who has been saved by God. The Church is you and me.

If we say, “We don’t need the church,” we’re actually saying, “We don’t need any other Christians, and we don’t need to be Christians ourselves.”

We are God’s family. Being a part of this family helps us live out the Christian life. We need each other because without each other, there’s no family. Without supporting each other in love, we will fall apart. God made us to live with him *together*. If we don’t live in community with others, we won’t live at all.

Like the coal removed from the fire, if we’re alone, our fire will fade. But if we’re around other Christians whose hearts are passionately on fire, our flame will grow brighter.

The Bible also tells us not to neglect meeting together.²¹³ If you don’t meet regularly with other believers to read the Bible, pray, and encourage each other to live the Christian life, you will eventually fall away from God. Being with other Christians in this way helps us grow; it also encourages and excites us.

We don’t just meet with each other because we have to. We meet with each other because it’s a gift to be together. It doesn’t mean we have to meet in our Christian friends’ homes, even though that’s beautiful and important. We need more than that.

What, exactly, do we need?

We need loving friends, personal accountability, solid teaching, Biblical authority, and opportunities to lead others closer to Christ.

We need to live under the authority of pastors and elders who have been given their positions after proving their faithfulness in their lifestyles and really growing to know God and his Word. If we are not under the authority of qualified teachers who live out what they preach, our beliefs about God can change into something God never intended.

²¹³ Hebrews 10:25

Most people don't like other people holding them accountable to live a certain way. It's uncomfortable to have our lives examined and to be told we're messing up and need to change. But if we aren't held accountable, our mistakes will build up until they explode and harm people.

By being part of a church, under qualified teachers who look like what's presented in the Bible,²¹⁴ we keep ourselves accountable.

The authority of qualified teachers also protects us from people who want to abuse others. It gives us people we can go to for help if we've been mistreated. Often we need someone to back us up.

Finally, it gives us a structure for community where we can find a way to help bring others closer to Christ. We can't forget that after God changes our lives, he tells us to teach others about him too.

It's easy to evangelize in an unstructured setting, but discipling people is a long-term commitment. We should always disciple people while submitting ourselves to the authority of pastors and elders who can keep us from leading people wrongly, or hurting people we're trying to help.

How do you find a faith community? First, ask God to help you. Then ask around. Notice people who are living pure, loving lives, and find out where they attend church. Start visiting churches. Look for a church where the people are welcoming, genuine, and loving. Find pastors and elders who believe in what the Bible plainly teaches, and don't doubt what the Bible says. Make sure they also live out what they say they believe. Otherwise, they don't really believe it.

Whatever church you go to, do the people love and serve each other? Do they love the Bible and help each other live their faith in practical, real ways that you can feel and see? No one will be perfect! But you can tell the difference between people who don't care whether their life is consistent, and people who regret their mistakes.

Just ask yourself this question: Is God being worshipped and honored there?

There is no perfect church community. Just find a decent church, go consistently, and don't complain. Be the change you want to see. Look for opportunities to encourage your family in Christ. Love people genuinely! Serve out of your love with a pure

214 Titus 1:5-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Peter 5:1-4

heart. Not as an attempt to be considered “good” by other people.

Recognize that we’re human, and that we need each other. You never know, the person who irritates you just might be someone God put into your life to help you grow. And you might have just been put into their life to gently help them grow in Christ.

Live peacefully, and honor God together. That’s the church.

DIG DEEPER

Find a church and attend it this upcoming Sunday. Write down your thoughts about the experience, and how it impacted you emotionally, spiritually, and physically.



PERSONAL NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I can't tell you how much of an honor it has been to talk with you about Jesus. This opportunity means so much to me!

Even though I grew up a relatively good kid in most people's eyes, I was a slave to evil. But because God, in his grace, revealed the good news of Jesus to me, my life has been changed. He has set me free from so much evil.

It didn't happen in a moment. I've made more mistakes along the way than I can count. But I love Jesus now more than anyone or anything else. He has *become* my life, and I have experienced and lived the life talked about in this book. I didn't write anything that didn't match up to my personal experience of real life.

There's not a day that goes by where I don't deeply want and need God's presence in me. He's my ultimate treasure, and I hope he will be your treasure too.

If you feel that your life doesn't match what God wants for you, remember that there's no real difference between you and me. There is nothing keeping you from living the life God is offering. It's a free gift. No one earns it.

This is the good news of the Gospel: God promises to love and forgive you, giving you life that won't end, freedom from evil, and close friendship with him as long as you trust and obey him in love.

If you want Jesus to be yours, pray this prayer with me:

Jesus, You died upon a cross
And rose again to save the lost
Forgive me now of all my sin
Come be my Savior, Lord, and Friend
Change my life and make it new
And help me, Lord, to live for You

I still pray that prayer often. It doesn't matter how many times I read it, I smile and think, "Yes, Jesus. I want you to be mine. And I want to be yours."

I'm praying that God's Spirit changes your heart, and that

you live life with him, faithfully to the end of your days.

In Christ,
Brennan McP