A COURSE FOR NEW BELIEVERS

CHRISTIANITY 101

A Step-by-Step Workbook



A 12-Lesson Course for New Believers

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TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Christianity 101

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Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Christianity 101: A 12-Lesson Course for New Believers

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Welcome to the Family

> *But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name*
>
> John 1:12 (SLB)

If you are holding this book, something has happened in your life. Maybe you prayed and asked Jesus to save you last week. Maybe it was years ago, and nobody ever sat down with you to explain what comes next. Maybe you are still thinking it over. Wherever you are, I am glad you are here.

I came to Christ as a boy. A neighbor down the street, a pastor named Jimmy Carter, paid me to mow his grass. He paid me something else too. He paid attention. With my parents' permission he took me to his church in Victorville, California, and that is where I first understood that Jesus died for me and that I could belong to God. I was somewhere between eight and ten years old.

I wish I could tell you that I never looked back. I did look back, more than once. I drifted, made bad choices, and came home again. But here is what I learned through all of it: God never let go of me. The things He started in me as a boy were still there when I came back as a grown man. What I needed most, at the start and every time I came home, was someone to show me the basics. That is what this course is for.

What This Course Is

Christianity 101 is a 12-lesson course for new believers. It covers the things every Christian needs to know in the first months of walking with Jesus. We will start at the beginning, with what it means to be saved, and finish with the promise that Jesus is coming back. In between, we will look at the Bible, prayer, the Holy Spirit, baptism, communion, the church, sin and temptation, giving, and how to tell others about Jesus.

This is not a course about rules. It is about a relationship. God did not save you so you could follow a checklist. He saved you so you could know Him. Everything in these pages is meant to help you know Him better.

How Each Lesson Works

Every lesson follows the same simple pattern, so you always know what to expect.

- **Opening.** A few paragraphs that introduce the subject.
- **Read it.** A key Bible passage, printed in full. Read it slowly. Read it twice if you can.
- **Understand it.** Plain teaching on what the passage means, with other verses that help explain it.

- **Fill it in.** Fill-in-the-blank questions taken word for word from the Bible. The answers are at the back of the book, but try them first.
- **Think it through.** Questions to answer in your own words, with lines to write on.
- **Memory verse.** One verse to learn by heart that week.
- **One step this week.** One simple thing to do before the next lesson.
- **Prayer.** A short prayer you can pray in your own words.

Most people can finish a lesson in about an hour. You can do it all at once or spread it over a few days. I suggest one lesson a week. That gives you time to learn the memory verse and take the action step before you move on.

Three Ways to Use This Book

On your own. Find a quiet place, have a pen ready, and work through one lesson a week. If something confuses you, write your question in the margin and ask a pastor or a mature Christian you trust.

With a mentor. This is the best way. Ask a Christian who has walked with the Lord for a while to meet with you once a week. You work through the lesson ahead of time, and then you talk about it together over a meal or a cup of something warm. I have been on both sides of that table, and I can tell you that both people grow.

In a small group. The lessons also work for a group of new believers meeting weekly. Notes for group leaders are at the back of the book.

A Few Words Before You Start

You do not need to know anything about the Bible to use this book. Every passage is printed for you. You will see Bible references written like this: John 3:16. That means the book of John, chapter 3, verse 16. If you have your own Bible, look the passages up as you go. It is good practice for finding your way around.

The Scripture in this book comes from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), a word-for-word translation in today's language. Words added in English to make the sense clear are printed in bold italics, so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

Finally, be patient with yourself. Nobody becomes a mature Christian in twelve weeks. Growing in Christ takes a lifetime. But every journey starts with a first step, and you have already taken it. Let's take the next one together.

Lesson 1: Coming Home: How You Are Saved

> *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
>
> Romans 5:8 (SLB)

The first thing every new Christian needs to settle is what actually happened when they were saved. If you are fuzzy on that, everything else will wobble. Some people think they were saved because they were good enough. Others think they were saved because they went forward at a church service, or because their parents were believers. Still others are not sure they were saved at all.

The Bible is clear and simple on this. Salvation is God's gift. You do not earn it, you receive it. In this lesson we will walk through what the Bible says about our problem, God's answer, and how a person receives that answer.

Read It

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this **is** not from yourselves; the gift **is** of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Understand It

The problem: we all fall short

The Bible does not start the good news with good news. It starts with the bad news, because you cannot understand the cure until you understand the sickness.

> *for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23)

"All" means all. The best person you know and the worst person you know are in the same boat. Sin is not just the big things like murder and theft. It is any time we go our own way instead of God's way. It is pride, selfishness, lying, bitterness, lust, and simply ignoring God. To "fall short of the glory of God" means we miss the mark He made us for.

And sin has a cost.

> *For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

Wages are what you earn. If you work a week, you get paid for a week. Paul says that what sin earns is death. That means more than physical death. It means being cut off from God, who is the source of life. Left to ourselves, that is where all of us are headed.

The answer: God's love in Christ

Look at the second half of Romans 6:23. "But the gift of God {is} eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Notice the contrast. Sin pays a wage. God gives a gift. You cannot earn a gift. If you pay for it, it is not a gift anymore.

Why would God give such a gift to people who had turned their backs on Him? Because He loves us.

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

God did not wait for us to clean ourselves up. Romans 5:8, at the top of this lesson, says Christ died for us "while we were still sinners." Jesus, the Son of God, lived the perfect life none of us could live. Then He died on the cross in our place, taking the penalty our sin earned. Three days later He rose from the dead, proving that the payment was accepted and that death had been beaten.

> *For I delivered to you among **the** first **things** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

That is the gospel, the good news, in a sentence: Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again.

How a person receives it: grace through faith

Now go back to the passage we read. "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Grace is God's kindness that we do not deserve. Faith is trusting Him, taking God at His word and resting our whole weight on what Jesus did.

Paul is careful to say what salvation is not. It is "not from yourselves" and "not from works, so that no one may boast." If we could earn our way to heaven, we would spend eternity bragging about it. Instead, everyone in heaven will be there for the same reason: Jesus paid for them.

Paul explains the same thing another way in his letter to the Romans.

> *that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved; for with **the** heart it is believed for righteousness, and with **the** mouth it is confessed for salvation.* (Romans 10:9-10)

To confess "Jesus is Lord" is to say out loud that He is in charge now. To believe God raised Him from the dead is to trust that He is alive and that His work is finished. Faith is not just knowing facts about Jesus. It is turning to Him and trusting Him.

What changed in you

When you trusted Christ, God did more than forgive you. He made you new.

> *Therefore if anyone **is** in Christ, **he is** a new creation; the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new.* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You may not feel very new yet. Old habits may still be hanging around. That is normal. But something real has happened. You have been adopted into God's family. John 1:12 says that to everyone who received Him, "He gave authority to become children of God." You are not on probation. You are a son or daughter.

I wandered from God more than once as an adult. Each time I came home, I half expected Him to make me earn my way back in. He never did. The door was open because Jesus had already paid. That is the God you belong to.

If you are not sure

Maybe you are reading this and you are not sure you have ever really trusted Christ. You can settle it right now. It is not about saying magic words. It is about turning to God and trusting Jesus. You might pray something like this:

> *God, I know I have sinned and gone my own way. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again. I turn from my sin and I trust Him as my Savior and my Lord. Thank You for forgiving me and making me Your child. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If you prayed that and meant it, tell someone today. Then keep going with this course.

Fill It In

1. for all _____ and fall short of the _____ of God **(Romans 3:23)**

2. For the _____ of sin ***is*** death, but the _____ of God ***is*** _____ in Christ Jesus our Lord. **(Romans 6:23)**

3. For by _____ you have been saved through _____, and this ***is*** not from yourselves; the gift ***is*** of God, not from _____, so that no one may boast. **(Ephesians 2:8-9)**

4. Therefore if anyone ***is*** in Christ, ***he is*** a _____; the old things have passed away; look, all things have become _____. **(2 Corinthians 5:17)**

Think It Through

1. In your own words, what is the difference between a wage and a gift? Why does that matter for salvation?

2. Why do you think so many people believe they have to earn their way to God?

3. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us "while we were still sinners." What does that tell you about how God sees you?

4. Write a short description of when and how you trusted Christ. If you are not sure, write what is holding you back.

MEMORY VERSE

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

Ephesians 2:8-9

One Step This Week Write your answer to question 4 on a card or in your phone. Then tell one Christian friend or family member that you have trusted Christ. Saying it out loud makes it real.

Want to Go Deeper? Read The Road Home, my book on God's plan of salvation, or the short tract Coming Home to God. Both are free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving me when I was still far from You. Thank You that Jesus paid for my sin and rose again. Help me rest in Your grace and stop trying to earn what You have already given. Teach me to know You. In Jesus' name, amen.

My Notes

Lesson 2: Knowing Where You Stand: Assurance

> *Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*
>
> John 5:24 (SLB)

Some new believers walk around with a quiet fear. They had a bad week, lost their temper, or fell back into an old habit, and now they wonder, "Am I really saved? Did it take?" Others have doubts that come at night for no reason at all.

God does not want His children living in that fog. He wants you to know where you stand with Him. In this lesson we will look at what God says to give you that confidence, and what to do when doubts come.

Read It

> *And this is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.* (1 John 5:11-13)

Understand It

God wants you to know

Read the last verse again. John says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." Not hope. Not guess. Know.

John wrote a whole letter partly so that believers could be sure. That alone tells us God is not trying to keep us in suspense. A good father does not leave his children wondering if they are still part of the family.

Assurance rests on a Person, not a feeling

Look at verse 12. "The one who has the Son has life." The question is not, "Do I feel saved today?" The question is, "Do I have the Son?" Have you trusted Jesus Christ? Then you have life, because the life is in Him.

Feelings come and go. You might feel close to God on Sunday and far away by Wednesday. Your feelings are real, but they are not the measure of your salvation. Christ is. If my assurance depended on how I felt, I would have given up a long time ago. I have had seasons when God felt distant. But He never left. I can look back now and see that He was holding on to me the whole time.

Jesus put it this way:

> *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they will certainly never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given **them** to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch **them** out of the hand of My Father.* (John 10:27-29)

Notice who is doing the holding. Jesus holds His sheep in His hand, and the Father holds them in His. Our confidence is not in how tightly we hold on to God. It is in how tightly He holds on to us.

No condemnation

One of the most freeing verses in the Bible is Romans 8:1.

> ***There is** therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to **the** flesh but according to **the** Spirit.* (Romans 8:1)

When you trusted Christ, the guilty verdict against you was cancelled. Jesus took the sentence. That does not mean you will never sin again, or that sin does not matter. It means that when you do sin, you come to God as a child who needs to make things right with his Father, not as a criminal waiting for a judge to send him away. We will talk more about dealing with sin in Lesson 9.

Signs of new life

The Bible also gives us signs that new life is real. John's letter mentions several. A believer wants to obey God (1 John 2:3). A believer loves other believers (1 John 3:14). A believer does not stay comfortable in sin (1 John 3:9). None of these is perfect in any of us. But if you see a new hunger for God, a new love for His people, and a new discomfort with sin, those are fingerprints of the Holy Spirit at work.

Paul adds this promise:

> *being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete **it** until **the** day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6)

God finishes what He starts. You are a work in progress, and the One working on you does not quit.

What about people who walk away?

You may know someone who once said they were a Christian and later turned away from the faith. Sincere, Bible-believing Christians have long disagreed about how to understand that. Some believe a true believer can never be lost. Others believe a person can walk away from Christ for good. I am not going to settle that argument in a new believer's course. What both sides agree on is this: if you are trusting Christ today, you can know you have eternal life today, and your confidence rests on what He has done, not on how well you have done.

When doubts come

Here are four things to do when doubt knocks on the door.

1. Go back to God's promises. Read 1 John 5:13 and John 10:27-29 out loud. Let God's Word speak louder than your feelings.
2. Look at the cross. Your salvation does not rest on your performance. It rests on Jesus' finished work. Was His payment enough? Yes.
3. Confess any known sin. Sometimes the uneasy feeling is the Holy Spirit pointing to something we need to make right. Make it right, and move on.
4. Talk to a mature believer. Doubts grow in the dark. Bring them into the light and let someone pray with you.

Fill It In

1. And this is the testimony, that God has given to us _____, and this life is in His _____. The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may _____ that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God. **(1 John 5:11-13)**

2. My sheep hear My _____, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they will certainly _____, and no one will _____ them out of My hand. My Father, who has given ***them*** to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch ***them*** out of the hand of My Father. **(John 10:27-29)**

3. ***There is*** therefore now _____ to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to ***the*** flesh but according to ***the*** Spirit. **(Romans 8:1)**

4. being confident of this very thing, that He who began a _____ in you will _____ ***it*** until ***the*** day of Jesus Christ **(Philippians 1:6)**

Think It Through

1. Have you ever doubted your salvation? What was going on in your life at the time?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Why is it dangerous to measure your salvation by your feelings?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. In John 10:27-29, who is holding whom? Why does that matter?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Which signs of new life (love for God, love for His people, discomfort with sin) do you see starting to grow in you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.

1 John 5:13

One Step This Week Write 1 John 5:13 on a card and keep it where you will see it every morning. Each time you read it, thank God out loud that you belong to Him.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Knowing Where I Stand with God, a short study on assurance, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that my salvation rests on what You did and not on how I feel. When doubts come, remind me of Your promises. Thank You for holding me in Your hand. Finish the good work You started in me. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 3: God's Word to You: The Bible

> *A lamp to my foot **is** Your word, and a light to my pathway.*
>
> Psalm 119:105 (SLB)

When you become a Christian, you join a family that has been reading the same Book for thousands of years. The Bible is not just a religious text or a collection of good advice. It is God speaking. If you want to know God, His Word is where you start.

Many new believers feel lost when they open a Bible. It is a big book, written over many centuries, with names and places that sound strange. That is all right. In this lesson we will look at what the Bible is, why you can trust it, and a simple way to start reading it every day.

Read It

> *Every Scripture **is** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which **is** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Understand It

What the Bible is

The Bible is 66 books, written by about 40 human authors over roughly 1,500 years. There are kings and fishermen, a doctor, a tax collector, shepherds and prophets. It has history, poetry, wisdom, letters and prophecy. Yet it tells one story from beginning to end: God creating a world, people turning away from Him, and God working through history to bring them back through Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament (39 books) tells the story before Jesus came. The New Testament (27 books) tells of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the start of the church, and what is still to come.

Where it came from

Paul says, "Every Scripture {is} God-breathed." That means the Bible did not start with human ideas. God breathed it out. He used real people with their own personalities and writing styles, but the words they wrote are the words He wanted written. Peter says that "holy men of God spoke" as they were "being borne by" the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

That is why you can trust it. The Bible is not a book about what people think of God. It is God telling us who He is and what He has done.

What it does

Paul lists four things Scripture is good for. It is good for **teaching**, which shows us what is true. It is good for **reproof**, which shows us where we have gone wrong. It is good for **correction**,

which shows us how to get back on track. And it is good for **training in righteousness**, which shows us how to keep walking the right way. The goal is that we may be "complete, fully equipped for every good work."

The Bible is also alive.

> *For the word of God **is** living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating as far as **the** division of both soul and spirit, of both joints and marrows, and able to judge **the** thoughts and intentions of **the** heart.* (Hebrews 4:12)

Have you ever read a verse and felt like it was written just for you, on that day? That is the living Word at work. The Bible reads us as much as we read it. It cuts through excuses and shows us what is really going on in our hearts.

Bread for every day

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness after forty days without food, He answered Satan with Scripture.

> *But answering, He said, "It has been written: 'Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through **the** mouth of God.'"* (Matthew 4:4)

Just as your body needs food every day, your soul needs God's Word every day. You would not try to live on one meal a week. Do not try to live on one sermon a week either.

Hearing is not enough

James gives a warning.

> *But be doers of **the** word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* (James 1:22)

The point of reading the Bible is not to collect information. It is to be changed. A person who reads about forgiveness but never forgives has fooled himself. Every time you read, ask, "What does this say, and what do I need to do about it?"

How to start

Here is a simple plan for a new believer.

1. **Start with the Gospel of John.** It was written so that people would believe in Jesus (John 20:31). Read one chapter a day. There are 21 chapters, so you will finish in three weeks.
2. **Then read Mark, Acts and Romans.** Mark is short and fast. Acts shows how the church began. Romans explains the gospel more fully than any other book.
3. **Pick a time and a place.** Morning works for many people, but any regular time will do. Consistency matters more than length.
4. **Use three questions.** What does it say? What does it mean? What should I do?

5. **Write one thing down.** Keep a notebook. One sentence a day adds up.

For many years I read and taught from other translations. Today I read and quote the Steadfast Literal Bible, and for deeper study I keep an interlinear Bible beside me that shows the original Hebrew and Greek words. You do not need any of that to start. You need a Bible you can understand, a few minutes, and a willing heart.

Fill It In

1. Every Scripture ***is*** _____ and profitable for _____, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be _____, fully equipped for every good work. **(2 Timothy 3:16-17)**

2. A _____ to my foot ***is*** Your word, and a _____ to my pathway. **(Psalm 119:105)**

3. For the word of God ***is*** _____ and _____ and sharper than any two-edged _____, and penetrating as far as ***the*** division of both soul and spirit, of both joints and marrows, and able to judge ***the*** thoughts and intentions of ***the*** heart. **(Hebrews 4:12)**

4. But be _____ of ***the*** word and not _____ only, deceiving yourselves. **(James 1:22)**

Think It Through

1. What does it mean that Scripture is "God-breathed"? Why does that make the Bible different from every other book?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Which of the four uses of Scripture (teaching, reproof, correction, training) do you need most right now? Why?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. What has kept you from reading the Bible regularly in the past? What could change that?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Choose a time and place for daily reading. Write them here.

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

*Every Scripture **is** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which **is** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

One Step This Week Start reading the Gospel of John, one chapter a day. After each chapter, write one sentence in a notebook about what you learned about Jesus.

Want to Go Deeper? Read How to Study the Bible for Yourself and Trusting the Word of God. When you are ready for more, A Year in the Word gives you a reading for every day of the year. All are free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Father, thank You for speaking to me in Your Word. Give me a hunger for it like a hunger for daily bread. Open my eyes to see Jesus on every page, and help me not just to hear but to do what You say. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 4: Talking with Your Father: Prayer

> *Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*
>
> Philippians 4:6-7 (SLB)

If the Bible is God speaking to us, prayer is us speaking to God. Every relationship needs both sides of the conversation. Imagine a marriage where one person did all the talking and the other never said a word. It would not be much of a marriage.

Many new believers are nervous about praying. They think they need special words, or that their prayers have to sound like a pastor's. They do not. Prayer is simply talking with God. In this lesson we will look at how Jesus taught His followers to pray, and some practical ways to make prayer a daily habit.

Read It

> *Therefore you, pray in this way: 'Our Father who **is** in the heavens, let Your name be sanctified; let Your kingdom come; let Your will come about, as in heaven, also on the earth. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages. Amen.'* (Matthew 6:9-13)

Understand It

You are talking to your Father

Jesus told His followers to begin, "Our Father." That is remarkable. The God who made the universe invites you to call Him Father. Prayer is not begging a distant ruler. It is a child talking to a dad who loves him.

Jesus also said:

> *But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who **is** in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* (Matthew 6:6)

Prayer does not have to be a show. Some of the most important prayers you ever pray will be said quietly, alone, with the door shut.

A pattern, not a script

The Lord's Prayer is a model. It is good to pray the words themselves, but Jesus was also showing us what to pray about. Look at the order.

- **God's name and kingdom first.** "Let Your name be sanctified; let Your kingdom come; let Your will come about." Before we ask for anything, we put God where He belongs, first.
- **Our daily needs.** "Give us today our daily bread." God cares about food, rent, work and health. Nothing is too small to bring to Him.
- **Forgiveness.** "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." We need forgiveness every day, and we need to give it every day.
- **Protection.** "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil." We ask God to keep us from sin and from the enemy.
- **Praise again.** "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory." We end where we began, with God.

Pray about everything

Paul gives us a simple rule.

> *Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:6-7)

"In everything." Not just the big things. The test results, the hard conversation, the car that will not start, the child who is struggling. Bring it all to God. And bring it "with thanksgiving." Thanking God reminds us of what He has already done, and that builds faith for what we are asking now.

The promise is not that every problem will vanish. The promise is peace, a peace that "surpasses all understanding," standing guard over your heart.

God hears

> *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from Him.* (1 John 5:14-15)

To pray "according to His will" does not mean we have to know God's will perfectly before we pray. It means we want His will more than our own. Jesus prayed this way in the garden the night before He died: "not My will, but Yours" (Luke 22:42). Sometimes God says yes. Sometimes He says wait. Sometimes He says no, because He has something better. But He always hears.

Keep praying

Jesus told a story about a widow who kept going back to an unjust judge until he finally gave her justice. Luke tells us why He told it.

> *And He was also speaking a parable to them about its being necessary always to pray and not to lose heart* (Luke 18:1)

If an unjust judge will finally answer, how much more will a loving Father? Do not give up. Some of my prayers took years to be answered. Some are still waiting.

I will be honest with you. My biggest struggle with prayer is busyness. When life gets full, I tend to put God on the back burner. Prayer is usually the first thing to go. I have learned that when I am too busy to pray, I am too busy. If that is your struggle too, start small and keep at it.

Simple ways to start

1. **Use the ACTS pattern.** Adoration (praise God for who He is), Confession (admit your sins), Thanksgiving (thank Him for what He has done), Supplication (ask for what you and others need).
2. **Keep a prayer list.** Write down people and needs. Note the date when God answers.
3. **Pray through your day.** Paul says, "Pray unceasingly" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). That does not mean being on your knees all day. It means talking with God throughout the day, at a red light, before a meeting, while washing dishes.
4. **Pray the Bible.** Take a psalm and turn it into your own prayer.

Fill It In

1. But you, when you pray, enter into your _____, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who ***is*** in _____; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. **(Matthew 6:6)**

2. Be anxious about _____, but in everything by prayer and supplication with _____ let your requests be made known to God; and the _____ of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. **(Philippians 4:6-7)**

3. And this is the _____ that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His _____, He _____ us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from Him. **(1 John 5:14-15)**

4. _____ always. Pray _____. In everything give _____; for this ***is the*** will of God in Christ Jesus toward you. **(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)**

Think It Through

1. Does it feel natural to call God "Father"? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Which part of the Lord's Prayer pattern do you tend to skip? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What is one worry you have not yet brought to God? Write it down and pray about it now.

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What usually crowds out prayer in your life? What is one change you could make?

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

One Step This Week Start a prayer list. Write down five people or needs. Pray through the list every day for a week, using the ACTS pattern. Leave room to write down answers.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Praying Every Day, Making Room for Prayer and Ask Seek Knock, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Our Father, thank You that I can come to You any time, about anything. Teach me to pray. Help me put You first, bring You my needs, forgive as I have been forgiven, and trust You with the answers. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 5: God Living in You: The Holy Spirit

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God

Romans 8:16 (SLB)

When you trusted Christ, you did not just get your sins forgiven and a ticket to heaven. God Himself came to live in you. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Many people are confused about the Holy Spirit. Some think of Him as a force or a feeling. Others are a little afraid of Him because of things they have seen on television. The Bible shows us that the Holy Spirit is a Person, the third Person of the Trinity, fully God, just like the Father and the Son. In this lesson we will look at who He is and what He does in the life of every believer.

Read It

> *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may remain with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not see Him nor know Him; but you know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you.* (John 14:16-17)

Understand It

He is a Person, not a thing

Notice how Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit. He calls Him "another Helper." He says "He" and "Him," not "it." The Spirit teaches (John 14:26), guides (John 16:13), and can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). You cannot grieve a force. You can only grieve a person who loves you.

The word "another" matters too. Jesus was saying, "I have been with you. Now I am sending another just like Me." The Spirit does for us what Jesus did for His disciples when He walked with them. He teaches, comforts, corrects and strengthens.

He lives in every believer

Jesus said the Spirit "remains with you and will be in you." Every true Christian has the Holy Spirit. Paul says plainly, "if anyone does not have {the} Spirit of Christ, this one is not His" (Romans 8:9). You do not have to earn the Spirit or wait for Him. If you belong to Christ, He is already in you.

That is why Paul says your body is now a temple.

> *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit **who is** in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

In the Old Testament, God's presence lived in the tabernacle and then in the temple in Jerusalem. Now He lives in His people. That changes how we think about our bodies, what we watch, where we go and how we treat ourselves.

He seals and secures you

> *in whom you also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in whom also having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is **the** pledge of our inheritance, for **the** redemption of the acquired possession, to **the** praise of His glory.* (Ephesians 1:13-14)

A seal in Paul's day was a mark of ownership and protection. The Spirit is God's mark on you that says, "This one is Mine." He is also a "pledge," like a down payment that guarantees the rest is coming. The Spirit in you now is God's promise of everything He has prepared for you later.

He assures you that you belong

Look at the verse at the top of this lesson. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Have you ever prayed and found yourself saying "Father" from your heart? That is the Spirit at work, reminding you whose child you are.

He guides you into truth

> *But when He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things **that are** coming.* (John 16:13)

When you read the Bible and something suddenly makes sense, that is the Spirit teaching you. He never leads you to anything that contradicts the Word He inspired. If a "word from the Spirit" goes against the Bible, it is not from the Spirit.

He gives you power

Before Jesus went back to heaven, He told His followers:

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to **the** uttermost part of the earth.* (Acts 1:8)

The disciples had run away when Jesus was arrested. A few weeks later, filled with the Spirit, they were preaching boldly in the same city. The same Spirit gives you power to live for Christ and to tell others about Him.

He grows fruit in you

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such **things** there is no law.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

Notice it is “fruit,” singular, not “fruits.” It is one crop with nine flavors. You do not produce it by gritting your teeth. Fruit grows when a branch stays connected to the vine (John 15:5). As you walk with God, the Spirit slowly grows these qualities in you. Patience shows up where there was a short temper. Peace shows up where there was worry.

Walking with the Spirit

Paul tells believers, “be filled with {the} Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). In the same verse he contrasts it with being drunk with wine. I know something about that contrast. For years I let alcohol control me. Being filled with the Spirit is the opposite: letting God’s Spirit be the One who directs your thoughts, words and choices. You do that day by day, by yielding to Him in prayer, obeying what you know from His Word, and confessing sin quickly so nothing stands between you and Him.

Fill It In

1. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another _____, so that He may remain with you _____, the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not see Him nor know Him; but you know Him, because He remains with you and will be _____. **(John 14:16-17)**

2. Or do you not know that your body is a _____ of the Holy Spirit ***who is*** in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a _____; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. **(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)**

3. in whom you also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in whom also having believed, you were _____ with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is ***the*** _____ of our inheritance, for ***the*** redemption of the acquired possession, to ***the*** praise of His glory. **(Ephesians 1:13-14)**

4. But the fruit of the Spirit is _____, joy, _____, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, _____; against such ***things*** there is no law. **(Galatians 5:22-23)**

Think It Through

1. Before this lesson, how did you think about the Holy Spirit? What has changed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What does it mean to you that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? What might need to change?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Which part of the fruit of the Spirit do you most want to see grow in your life? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Have you ever sensed the Spirit helping you understand the Bible or giving you courage? Describe it.

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such ***things*** *there is no law.*

Galatians 5:22-23

One Step This Week Each morning, pray this short prayer: "Holy Spirit, I yield to You today. Lead me, teach me and grow Your fruit in me." Each evening, write down one place you saw Him at work.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Knowing the Holy Spirit, Given and Grown (on the gifts and fruit of the Spirit) and One God, Three Persons (on the Trinity), free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank You for living in me. Teach me the truth, give me power to live for Jesus, and grow Your fruit in my life. Help me never to grieve You. Fill me today. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 6: Going Public: Baptism

> *For as many **of you** as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
>
> Galatians 3:27 (SLB)

On October 19, 1995, I was baptized. I had believed in God as long as I could remember, and I had trusted Christ as a boy. But that day I stood up in front of people and showed the world whose I was. That same day I had the privilege of baptizing my wife. Years later I baptized our youngest daughter in our own backyard pool. Those are some of the best days of my life.

Baptism is one of the first steps of obedience Jesus asks of a new believer. In this lesson we will look at what baptism is, what it is not, and why it matters.

Read It

> *Or are you unaware that as many **of us** as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of **the** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:3-4)

Understand It

Jesus commanded it

Baptism was not the church's idea. Jesus gave the command just before He returned to heaven.

> *Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you; and look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age. Amen.* (Matthew 28:19-20)

Notice the order. Make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. Baptism belongs at the start of the Christian life, as one of the first things a new disciple does.

The early church did it right away

In the book of Acts, people were baptized soon after they believed. On the day the church began, Peter preached about Jesus and the crowd was cut to the heart.

> *So then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and **there** were added on that day about three thousand souls.* (Acts 2:41)

Later, Philip explained the good news about Jesus to an Ethiopian official riding in his chariot.

> *And Philip, having opened his mouth and having begun from this Scripture, preached Jesus **as** the gospel to him. And as they were going along the road, they came upon some*

> *water; and the eunuch says, "Look, water! What hinders me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe from all your heart, it is permitted." And answering, he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.* (Acts 8:35-38)

Notice what came first. The man believed. Then he was baptized. Baptism follows faith. It is for people who have trusted Christ.

What baptism pictures

Go back to our main passage, Romans 6:3-4. Paul says that when we were baptized into Christ, "we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of {the} dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life."

Baptism is a picture of the gospel and a picture of what happened to you. Going under the water pictures dying and being buried with Christ. Your old life is over. Coming up out of the water pictures rising with Him to a brand new life. The word "baptize" means to dip or immerse, which is why many churches baptize by putting a person all the way under the water.

Galatians 3:27, at the top of this lesson, says those baptized into Christ "have put on Christ." It is like putting on a uniform. Baptism says publicly, "I am on His team now."

What baptism is not

Baptism does not save you. You were saved by grace through faith, as we saw in Lesson 1. The Bible gives no record that the thief on the cross next to Jesus was ever baptized, yet Jesus told him, "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Water does not wash away sin. Only the blood of Jesus does that.

Some verses, like Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:21, connect baptism closely with forgiveness and salvation. Peter explains in 1 Peter 3:21 that it is "not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God." The water itself does nothing. Baptism is the outward sign of the inward change God has already made, and the believer's pledge to follow Him.

Christians have different views on baptism. Some baptize infants, and some sprinkle or pour water instead of immersing. I believe the New Testament pattern is to baptize believers after they trust Christ. If you have questions about how your church practices it, ask your pastor.

Baptism is not optional

Even though baptism does not save you, it is not something to skip. Jesus commanded it. If you love Him, you will want to obey Him. Think of it like a wedding ring. The ring does not make you married, but a husband who refuses to wear one sends a message. Baptism is how you tell the world, "I belong to Jesus."

Paul himself was told, "why do you delay? Having risen up, be baptized" (Acts 22:16). If you have trusted Christ and have not been baptized, why wait?

What to do next

- ☐ Talk to a pastor at your church about being baptized.
- ☐ Ask if they have a class or a meeting for people getting baptized.
- ☐ Think about who you want to invite. Baptism is a public celebration.
- ☐ Write out a short account of how you came to Christ. Many churches will ask you to share it.

Fill It In

1. Therefore, having gone, make _____ of all the nations, _____ them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, _____ them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you; and look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age. Amen. **(Matthew 28:19-20)**

2. Or are you unaware that as many ***of us*** as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were _____ with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of ***the*** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in _____. **(Romans 6:3-4)**

3. For as many ***of you*** as were baptized into Christ have _____. **(Galatians 3:27)**

Think It Through

1. In your own words, what does baptism picture?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Why is it important that baptism follows faith rather than causing it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. If you have already been baptized, write about that day. If you have not, what is holding you back?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Who would you want to invite to see your baptism? Why?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of **the** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.*

Romans 6:4

One Step This Week If you have not been baptized since trusting Christ, call or email your pastor this week and ask about it. If you have been baptized, thank God for that day and tell someone about it.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Understanding Baptism, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that I have died to my old life and been raised to a new one with You. Give me courage to follow You in baptism and to live every day as someone who belongs to You. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 7: Remembering Him: Communion

> *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 11:26 (SLB)

The night before He died, Jesus sat at a table with His closest friends. He took ordinary bread and an ordinary cup and gave them new meaning. Then He said, "do this in My remembrance." Ever since that night, Christians around the world have gathered to eat the bread and drink the cup together.

This meal goes by several names: Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, and the breaking of bread. In this lesson we will look at where it came from, what it means, and how to come to the table in the right way.

Read It

> *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was being betrayed, took bread; and having given thanks, He broke* ***it*** *and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is being broken for you; do this in My remembrance." Likewise also* ***He took*** *the cup after having supped, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink* ***it****, in My remembrance." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Understand It

Where it came from

Jesus gave this meal during the Passover, the yearly feast when Israel remembered how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. On the first Passover, each family killed a lamb and put its blood on the doorframe. When God's judgment passed through Egypt, it passed over every house marked by the blood.

Jesus took that old meal and showed what it had been pointing to all along. He is the Lamb. His blood is what protects us from judgment. Paul says, "our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The bread: His body given for you

Luke records Jesus' words this way:

> *And having taken bread, having given thanks, He broke* ***it*** *and gave* ***it*** *to them, saying, "This is My body, which is being given for you; do this for My remembrance." And likewise*

> *the cup after dining, saying, "This cup **is** the new covenant in My blood, which is being poured out for you."* (Luke 22:19-20)

The bread pictures Jesus' body, given on the cross. When you eat it, you remember that He did not just die for the world in general. He died for you.

The cup: a new covenant in His blood

A covenant is a binding agreement. In the old covenant, God gave His law and the people promised to keep it, but they kept breaking it. In the new covenant, God promised to forgive sins and write His law on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). That covenant was sealed with Jesus' blood. Every time you take the cup, you remember that your sins are forgiven because of what His blood paid for.

Three directions

I find it helpful to think of Communion as looking in three directions.

- **Looking back.** "Do this in My remembrance." We remember the cross.
- **Looking around.** We do it together. Paul says, "Because {there is} one bread, we who are many are one body" (1 Corinthians 10:17). The Supper is a family meal. We share in Christ, and we share with each other.
- **Looking ahead.** "You proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes." Every Communion service is a reminder that Jesus is coming back. One day we will eat with Him in His kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

What the bread and cup are

Christians have different views about what happens in the bread and cup. Some believe they become the actual body and blood of Christ. Others believe Christ is present in a spiritual way. I believe, along with many others, that the bread and cup are pictures that help us remember Jesus and proclaim His death, and that as we eat and drink in faith we have real fellowship with Him and with each other. Whatever a church believes, all agree that the meal points to Jesus and what He did on the cross.

Coming to the table the right way

Paul gives a serious warning.

> *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.* (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

Some new believers read this and are afraid to take Communion at all. That is not what Paul meant. To eat "unworthily" means to eat in an unworthy manner. In Corinth, some people were

getting drunk at the meal while others went hungry (1 Corinthians 11:21). They were treating the Lord's Supper like a party and ignoring their brothers and sisters.

None of us is worthy on our own. That is the whole point. The table is for sinners who have been forgiven. Paul's instruction is simple: "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat." Not examine himself and stay away. Examine himself and then eat.

Before you take Communion, take a moment to:

☐ Remember what Jesus did for you on the cross.

☐ Confess any sin the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

☐ Make things right with anyone you are holding a grudge against, if you can.

☐ Thank God for His forgiveness and His promise to return.

A word for those in recovery: many churches serve grape juice instead of wine. If yours serves wine and that is a problem for you, ask your pastor. Most churches are glad to offer juice.

Fill It In

1. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was being betrayed, took bread; and having given thanks, He broke ***it*** and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is being broken for you; do this in My _____." Likewise also ***He took*** the cup after having supped, saying, "This cup is the _____ in My blood; do this, as often as you drink ***it***, in My remembrance." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord _____. **(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)**

2. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a _____ in the blood of the Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of the Christ? Because ***there is*** one bread, we who are many are _____; for we all partake of the one bread. **(1 Corinthians 10:16-17)**

3. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man _____ himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. **(1 Corinthians 11:27-29)**

Think It Through

1. What do the bread and the cup each picture?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Which of the three directions (back, around, ahead) means the most to you right now? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What does it mean to "examine himself" before Communion? What would that look like for you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Is there anyone you need to make things right with before you come to the table?

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.

1 Corinthians 11:26

One Step This Week Find out how often your church takes Communion. The next time you take it, arrive a few minutes early and use the checklist above to prepare your heart.

Want to Go Deeper? Read The Lord's Table, my complete guide to Communion, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Your body and Your blood for me. Every time I eat the bread and drink the cup, help me remember You, love Your people, and look forward to the day You come again. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 8: You Belong: The Church

> *and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as **is the** custom of some, but encouraging **one another**, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.*
>
> Hebrews 10:24-25 (SLB)

Some people say, "I love Jesus, but I don't need the church." I understand why. Churches are made up of people, and people can let you down. But the Bible does not give us the option of following Jesus alone. When you were saved, you were born into a family. A family is something you belong to, not something you visit.

In this lesson we will look at what the church is, what the first Christians did when they met, and why you need a church and the church needs you.

Read It

> *And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those believing were together and had all things in common; and they were selling the possessions and the goods and dividing them to all, as anyone had need. And every day, steadfastly continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were partaking of food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:42-47)

Understand It

What the church is

The word "church" in the New Testament never means a building. It means people, those who have been called out of the world to belong to Jesus. Jesus said, "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). It is His church. He started it, He leads it, and He will finish it.

The church is the whole family of believers everywhere, in every age. It also shows up as local churches, groups of believers who meet together in one place. You belong to the big family the moment you trust Christ. The local church is where you live that out.

What the first church did

Look at Acts 2:42. The first Christians "were steadfastly continuing" in four things.

- **The teaching of the apostles.** They learned God's Word together. Today we have that teaching in the New Testament.

- **The fellowship.** They shared their lives. The word means sharing in common.
- **The breaking of the bread.** They ate together and remembered Jesus at the Lord's Supper.
- **The prayers.** They prayed together.

And look at what happened: generosity, gladness, praise, and "the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved." A healthy church is not perfect, but it is a place where people grow and others come to Christ.

One body, many parts

Paul uses a picture to explain how the church works.

> *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also **is** the Christ. For indeed by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and we were all made to drink into one Spirit. For indeed the body is not one member, but many.* (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

> *Now you are **the** body of Christ, and members individually.* (1 Corinthians 12:27)

A body needs every part. A hand cannot say to a foot, "I don't need you." In the same way, every believer has a place and a purpose. God gives every Christian at least one spiritual gift to serve others.

> *each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves, as good stewards of **the** manifold grace of God.* (1 Peter 4:10)

You may not know your gift yet. That is fine. Start serving where there is a need, and over time you and others will see where God has gifted you.

I have seen this up close. For five years I helped lead mission teams to Baja, Mexico, twice a year. We worked alongside local believers from another culture. Many of them had very little, but they had a joy I will never forget. We came from different cultures, but we were one body. That is the church.

Why you need a church

Hebrews 10:24-25, at the top of this lesson, tells us not to forsake "the assembling together of ourselves, as {is the} custom of some." Here is why.

1. **You need to be taught.** God gives pastors and teachers to equip believers (Ephesians 4:11-12).
2. **You need encouragement.** Some weeks you will not feel like following Jesus. Other believers can stir you up to love and good works.

3. **You need accountability.** When you stumble, believers who love you can help restore you (Galatians 6:1).
4. **You need to serve.** You cannot use your gifts for others if you are not around others.
5. **The church needs you.** Somebody in your church needs what God has given you.

How to find a good church

If you do not have a church home, look for these things.

- ☐ The Bible is taught clearly and taken seriously.
- ☐ Jesus is at the center, and the gospel of grace is preached.
- ☐ Baptism and the Lord's Supper are practiced.
- ☐ People pray together and care for one another.
- ☐ The leaders live what they teach and are accountable.
- ☐ There is a place for you to grow, such as a small group or class.

No church will be perfect. If you find a perfect one, don't join it, because you will ruin it. Find a faithful one, commit to it, and give it time.

Fill It In

1. And they were steadfastly continuing in the _____ of the apostles and in the _____, and in the breaking of the bread and in the _____. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those believing were together and had all things in common; and they were selling the possessions and the goods and dividing them to all, as anyone had need. And every day, steadfastly continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were partaking of food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved. **(Acts 2:42-47)**

2. Now you are ***the*** _____, and members individually. **(1 Corinthians 12:27)**

3. each one, as he has received a _____, serving it among yourselves, as good _____ of ***the*** manifold grace of God. **(1 Peter 4:10)**

4. and let us consider one another for _____ of love and of good works, not _____ the assembling together of ourselves, as ***is the*** custom of some, but

encouraging ***one another***, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

Think It Through

1. What has been your experience with church in the past, good or bad?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Which of the four things in Acts 2:42 is strongest in your life right now? Which is weakest?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What do you think your spiritual gift might be? Where could you start serving?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. If you do not have a church home yet, what is your next step to find one?

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as ***is the*** *custom of some, but encouraging* ***one another****, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.*

Hebrews 10:24-25

One Step This Week If you have a church, sign up for one way to serve or one small group. If you do not have a church, visit one this Sunday, using the checklist above.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Growing Together as the Church and Prayer and the Church, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for making me part of Your family. Lead me to a church where I can grow and serve. Show me my gifts, and help me love Your people, even when it is hard. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 9: Fighting the Good Fight: Sin and Temptation

In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You.

Psalm 119:11 (SLB)

Here is something nobody told me when I was young in the faith: becoming a Christian does not end the battle with sin. In some ways it starts it. Before you knew Christ, you went with the current. Now you are swimming against it. You will feel the pull of old habits, old desires and old ways of thinking. That pull does not mean you are not saved. It means you are alive.

In this lesson we will look at where temptation comes from, how God helps us stand, and what to do when we fall.

Read It

> *No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God **is** faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure **it**.* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Understand It

Where temptation comes from

James explains how temptation works.

> *Let no one say when he is being tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God is unable to be tempted by evils, and He Himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted by **his** own desire, being drawn away and being enticed. Then the desire, having conceived, gives birth to sin; and the sin, having been brought to completion, brings forth death.* (James 1:13-15)

God never tempts us to sin. Temptation starts inside us, with our own desires. Then comes the hook: "being drawn away and being enticed." Then desire "gives birth to sin," and sin, left alone, "brings forth death." It is a process. The earlier you deal with it, the easier it is to stop.

We also have an enemy. The Bible tells us the devil is real and that he schemes against believers (Ephesians 6:11). And the world around us constantly pushes us to fit its mold (Romans 12:2). The Christian life is a real fight.

You are not alone in it

Our main verse, 1 Corinthians 10:13, gives three promises.

- **Your temptation is not unique.** "No temptation has taken you except what is human." Others have faced the same thing and won.
- **God is faithful.** He "will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able."

- **There is always a way out.** God "will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure {it}." Your job is to look for the door and take it.

Jesus Himself was tempted. He knows what it is like.

> *For we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses, but* ***one*** *who has been tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin. Let us therefore come with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help.* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

When you are tempted, you do not have to hide from God. Run to Him. His throne is a throne of grace.

How Jesus fought temptation

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus answered every temptation with Scripture. "It has been written," He said, and quoted God's Word (Matthew 4:4). That is why memorizing Scripture matters so much. The psalmist said, "In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You."

Practical ways to stand

1. **Know your weak spots.** Be honest about where, when and with whom you are most often tempted.
2. **Avoid the setup.** Paul told young Timothy to "flee youthful desires" (2 Timothy 2:22). Sometimes the bravest thing to do is leave.
3. **Walk by the Spirit.** "Walk by {the} Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out {the} desire of {the} flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Fill your life with what is good, and there is less room for what is not.
4. **Use God's Word.** Have a verse ready for your most common temptation.
5. **Resist the devil.** "Be subject therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).
6. **Tell someone.** Sin grows in secret. Find a trusted believer who can pray with you and ask you hard questions.

My story

I am a recovering alcoholic. I drank off and on from my teens. After a serious hiking accident in 2014 and four major surgeries, I started using alcohol to cover the pain. Little by little it became a full addiction. I was still working and functioning, and I fooled myself into thinking I had it under control. I did not.

On May 29, 2020, it came to an end. My wife saw what I was hiding. Her hurt and her love broke my pride, and she took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. I walked in still drunk and

wept through the whole meeting. I have not had a drink since, not one day. God gave me what I needed one day at a time, and He gave me people who walked with me through those first months.

I tell you this because I want you to know two things. First, no sin is too big for God to forgive or too strong for Him to break. Second, you cannot fight alone. I needed help, and I am not ashamed of that.

When you fall

You will sin. When you do, here is what to do.

> *If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:8-9)

Confess means to agree with God about it. Call it what He calls it, without excuses. And then believe Him. He "is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us." You do not have to earn your way back. Get up, make things right where you can, and keep walking.

One more thing. Making things right with God does not always mean everyone else will forgive you right away. Some people may still be hurt and may still remember. Do what is right anyway, and leave the rest with God. Do not let what others think keep you from walking forward with Him.

Fill It In

1. No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God ***is*** _____, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the _____, so that you may be able to endure ***it***. **(1 Corinthians 10:13)**

2. Let no one say when he is being tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God is unable to be tempted by evils, and He Himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted by ***his*** _____, being drawn away and being enticed. Then the desire, having conceived, gives birth to _____; and the sin, having been brought to completion, brings forth death. **(James 1:13-15)**

3. If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we _____ our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may _____ us the sins and _____ us from all unrighteousness. **(1 John 1:8-9)**

4. Be subject therefore to God. _____ the devil, and he will _____ from you. **(James 4:7)**

Think It Through

1. Where do you feel the strongest pull to go back to your old life?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What "way out" has God given you in the past when you were tempted? Did you take it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Who is one trusted believer you could ask to pray for you and hold you accountable?

_____

_____

_____

4. Is there any sin you need to confess to God right now? You do not have to write it here. Just take a moment and do it.

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

*No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God **is** faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure **it**.*

1 Corinthians 10:13

One Step This Week Pick your most common temptation. Find one verse that speaks to it, write it on a card, and memorize it. The next time the temptation comes, say the verse out loud.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Guarding My Walk with God and Walking in Purity and Freedom. If you are fighting an addiction, read New Beginnings, a Christ-centered 12-step course. All are free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Father, I cannot win this fight in my own strength. Thank You that Jesus was tempted and did not sin, and that I can come to Your throne of grace for help. Show me the way out, and give me the courage to take it. When I fall, help me get back up. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 10: Open Hands: Giving

> *In all things I showed you that by laboring thus it is necessary to help those who are weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*
>
> Acts 20:35 (SLB)

Money is one of the most talked-about subjects in the Bible. Jesus spoke about it often, not because God needs our money, but because money has a way of grabbing our hearts. How we handle what God gives us shows a lot about who we really trust.

In this lesson we will look at why Christians give, how the Bible teaches us to give, and how to get started.

Read It

> *Now this **I say**: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings. Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God **is** able to make all grace abound to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

Understand It

It all belongs to God

The first truth about giving is that nothing we have is really ours. When King David and the people of Israel gave a huge offering to build the temple, David prayed, "For everything {is} from You, and from Your hand we have given to You" (1 Chronicles 29:14). We are managers, not owners. God trusts us with money, time and abilities, and He asks us to use them for Him.

Jesus gave first

Paul gives the reason behind all Christian giving.

> *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor, being rich, so that you by His poverty might become rich.* (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven and gave His life for us. We do not give to get God's attention or to pay Him back. We give because He gave first. I have come to see giving this way: it is not about what we receive. It honors what we have already been given.

Where your heart is

> *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where*

neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

Jesus did not say, "Where your heart is, your treasure will follow." He said it the other way around. Where you put your treasure, your heart follows. If you want to love God more, put more of your treasure into what He cares about.

How to give

Our main passage gives four principles.

- **Give generously.** "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." This is not a promise that you will get rich. It means a generous life is a full life, and God sees and rewards it in His way.
- **Give on purpose.** "Each {one should give} just as he purposes in the heart." Think and pray about it ahead of time. Plan it.
- **Give freely.** "Not out of grief or out of necessity." God does not want gifts squeezed out by guilt or pressure.
- **Give cheerfully.** "God loves a cheerful giver." The word "cheerful" pictures someone who is glad to give.

And God promises to take care of the giver. He "is able to make all grace abound to you," so that you have enough and can keep doing good.

What about the tithe?

A tithe means a tenth. In the Old Testament, God's people gave a tenth of their crops and livestock to support the priests and the temple (Malachi 3:10). The New Testament does not set a percentage for Christians. Instead it calls us to give generously, regularly and cheerfully, in proportion to what we have (1 Corinthians 16:2). Many believers find the tithe a good place to start, and I agree it is a good start. But it is not a rule to keep you under, and it is not a ceiling. Some can give more. Some, for a season, can give less, and God sees the heart.

The widow's two coins

And having looked up, He saw the ones casting their gifts into the treasury, rich ***men****. And He saw also a certain poor widow casting in there two lepta. And He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has cast in more than all; for all these out of what was abounding to them cast into the gifts of God, but she out of her poverty cast in all the livelihood that she had."* (Luke 21:1-4)

God does not measure gifts by size. He measures them by the heart and by what they cost the giver. A small gift given in love can be worth more in God's eyes than a large gift given for show.

More than money

Giving is not only about money. You can give your time to serve at church or help a neighbor. You can give your skills and your home. I have seen people with very little give with great joy. On our trips to Baja, Mexico, we worked with believers who had almost nothing by our standards, yet they shared what they had and praised God while they did it. Watching them taught me a great deal about giving.

Getting started

1. **Pray about it.** Ask God what He wants you to give.
2. **Decide ahead of time.** Pick an amount or a percentage, and give it first, not from what is left over.
3. **Give to your local church.** It is where you are fed and where you serve.
4. **Look for needs.** Watch for people around you that you can help.
5. **Get out of debt where you can.** Debt makes it hard to be generous. Living below your means frees you to give.

Fill It In

1. Now this ***I say***: he who sows _____ will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings. Each ***one should give*** just as he _____ in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a _____. And God ***is*** able to make all grace abound to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work **(2 Corinthians 9:6-8)**

2. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves _____, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal; for where your treasure is, there your _____ will be also. **(Matthew 6:19-21)**

3. In all things I showed you that by laboring thus it is necessary to help those who are weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is _____ to give than to receive.' **(Acts 20:35)**

Think It Through

1. Do you think of your money as yours or as God's? How does that show in the way you spend it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Which of the four principles of giving (generous, planned, free, cheerful) is hardest for you? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What does the widow's gift teach you about how God sees what you give?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What is one way, besides money, that you could give this month?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

*Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

2 Corinthians 9:7

One Step This Week Sit down with your budget, or start one. Pray, decide what you will give to your church each time you are paid, and give it first.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Money, Giving and Enough, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord, everything I have comes from You. Thank You for giving me Your Son. Free my heart from the grip of money. Make me a cheerful, generous giver, and help me store up treasure in heaven. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 11: Telling Your Story: Sharing Your Faith

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is **the** power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to **the** Jew first and to **the** Greek.*
>
> Romans 1:16 (SLB)

When something wonderful happens to you, you want to tell people. A new baby, a new job, a great meal at a new restaurant. You do not need training to share good news. You just share it.

Becoming a Christian is the best news there is. Yet many believers never tell anyone. They are afraid of saying the wrong thing, of being rejected, or of not having all the answers. In this lesson we will see that sharing your faith is simpler than you think, and that God does the hard part.

Read It

> *but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **be** ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear* (1 Peter 3:15)

Understand It

Every believer is a witness

Before Jesus went back to heaven, He told His followers, "you will be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8). A witness is not a lawyer who has to argue the case. A witness simply tells what he has seen and heard. When the religious leaders ordered Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus, they answered, "we are not able not to speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

You may not know much theology yet. That is all right. You know what Jesus has done for you.

Start at home

When Jesus freed a man from a terrible bondage, the man wanted to go with Jesus. Jesus told him something else.

> *But Jesus did not permit him, but says to him, "Go to your house, to your own **people**, and report to them how much the Lord did for you, and **how** He had mercy on you."*
> (Mark 5:19)

Jesus did not send him to a seminary or a foreign country. He sent him home to his own people, to tell them what the Lord had done. That is where most of us start, with family, friends, coworkers and neighbors who already know us.

You do not need all the answers

In John 9, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. The religious leaders grilled him with hard questions about Jesus. He did not know how to answer most of them. But he knew one thing.

> *Then he answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one **thing** I know, that being blind, now I see."* (John 9:25)

That is the power of a personal story. People can argue with your opinions. It is much harder to argue with what happened to you. Over the years people have asked me about my faith and about how I got sober. I do not always have a polished answer. I tell them what God did.

Be ready, with gentleness

Our main verse says to be "ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you." Notice the word "asks." When you live with real hope, people notice, and some will ask. Be ready.

Notice also how Peter says to answer: "with gentleness and fear." Sharing your faith is not winning an argument. Paul says the same thing.

> *Walk in wisdom toward those outside, redeeming the time. **Let** your word **be** always in grace, seasoned with salt, to know how you must answer each one.* (Colossians 4:5-6)

Kindness opens more doors than cleverness. Listen first. Ask questions. Be honest when you do not know something. Respect people even when they disagree.

Write your story

A simple way to tell your story has three parts.

1. **Before.** What was your life like before you trusted Christ? What were you looking for? Keep it honest, but you do not need to share every detail.
2. **How.** How did you come to trust Christ? Who or what did God use?
3. **Since.** What has changed since then? What difference does Jesus make now?

Aim for something you could say in two or three minutes. Use plain words, not church words.

Share the message, not just your story

Your story opens the door. The gospel is what walks through it. Be ready to explain the good news simply. You learned it in Lesson 1.

- God loves you and made you to know Him (John 3:16).
- We have all sinned, and sin separates us from God (Romans 3:23; 6:23).
- Jesus died for our sins and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- We receive Him by grace through faith, trusting Him as Savior and Lord (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God does the saving

Here is the good news for nervous witnesses. You are not responsible for anyone's response. Your job is to be faithful. The Holy Spirit is the One who opens hearts. Paul says we are "ambassadors" for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador delivers the message of the one who sent him. Whether people accept it is up to them and to God.

Fill It In

1. For I am not _____ of the gospel of Christ; for it is ***the*** _____ of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to ***the*** Jew first and to ***the*** Greek. **(Romans 1:16)**

2. but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and ***be*** _____ always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the _____ in you, with _____ and fear **(1 Peter 3:15)**

3. But Jesus did not permit him, but says to him, "Go to your house, to your own ***people***, and _____ to them how much the Lord did for you, and ***how*** He had _____ on you." **(Mark 5:19)**

4. Therefore on behalf of Christ we are _____, as though God were urging through us; we implore ***you*** on behalf of Christ: be _____ to God. **(2 Corinthians 5:20)**

Think It Through

1. What makes you most nervous about sharing your faith?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Write your "before" here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Write your “how” here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Write your “since” here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. List three people in your life who do not know Jesus. Begin praying for them by name.

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

*but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **be** ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear*

1 Peter 3:15

One Step This Week Practice telling your story to a Christian friend. Then pray every day for the three people you listed, and ask God for an opening to share with one of them.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Telling Others What Christ Has Done and Serving Others and Sharing Christ. The tract Coming Home to God is a simple handout you can give to someone. All are free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for what You have done for me. Make me unashamed of the gospel. Give me courage and gentleness, open doors for me to share, and open the hearts of the people I am praying for. Amen.

My Notes

Lesson 12: Living in Hope: The Return of Christ

> *awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*
>
> Titus 2:13 (SLB)

We end this course where history is heading. Jesus is coming back. The same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, died on the cross and rose from the dead will return. That is not wishful thinking. It is one of the most repeated promises in the New Testament.

I have stood beside families at funerals. I have seen what it means to grieve with hope and what it looks like to grieve without it. The promise of Christ's return changes everything about how we face death, how we live today and what we look forward to.

Read It

> *Let your heart not be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In the house of My Father are many dwelling places; but if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be.* (John 14:1-3)

Understand It

Jesus promised to come back

On the night before He died, Jesus told His troubled disciples not to be afraid. He was going to prepare a place for them, and He promised, "I am coming again and will receive you to Myself."

Forty days after He rose, Jesus was taken up into heaven while His disciples watched. Two angels appeared and gave them a promise.

> *who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven."* (Acts 1:11)

He will come back in person. Not as an idea or a feeling, but "this Jesus."

The catching away of the church

Paul wrote to believers in Thessalonica who were worried about Christians who had died. Would they miss out when Jesus came? Paul answered:

> *because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with **the** voice of an archangel and with **the** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in **the** clouds*

> *to meet the Lord in **the** air; and so we will always be with **the** Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

The words "caught away" are often called the Rapture, from the Latin word for being caught up. Jesus will come for His church. Believers who have died will be raised first, and then believers who are alive will be caught up to meet Him. Paul says it will happen "in an instant, in {the} blink of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Before the time of wrath

The Bible also speaks of a time of great trouble on the earth before Jesus sets up His kingdom, often called the Tribulation. I believe, as many Bible teachers do, that Jesus will catch away His church before that time begins. Paul wrote, "God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Jesus promised the faithful church, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world" (Revelation 3:10).

After that time, Jesus will return in glory with His people, defeat evil, and reign. Finally, God will make a new heaven and a new earth where "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer" (Revelation 21:4).

Sincere Christians hold different views about the order of these events. What all Bible-believing Christians agree on is the main thing: Jesus is coming back, and we should be ready.

No one knows when

People have tried to predict the date of Christ's return for centuries. They have always been wrong. Jesus said, "concerning that day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels of the heavens, except My Father alone" (Matthew 24:36). Be wary of anyone who claims to know the date. Our job is not to calculate. It is to be ready.

How this hope changes us

The promise of His return is not just for charts and debates. It changes how we live.

- **It comforts us.** Paul ends his teaching with, "Therefore encourage one another with these words." Death is not the end for those who belong to Christ. We grieve, but not "just as also the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
- **It purifies us.** John writes, "everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). If Jesus could come today, I want Him to find me living for Him.
- **It sends us out.** Peter explains why the Lord has not come yet: He "is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Every day He waits is another day for someone to come home.
- **It gives us perspective.** "For our citizenship exists in {the} heavens" (Philippians 3:20). This world is not our final home. That helps us hold our troubles and our possessions loosely.

What we will be

> *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* (1 John 3:2-3)

We do not know everything about what heaven will be like. But we know the best part: we will see Jesus as He is, and we will be like Him. Every struggle you face as a new believer, every fight with sin, every slow step of growth, is heading toward that day.

Fill It In

1. Let your heart not be _____; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In the house of My Father are many dwelling places; but if not, I would have told you. I go to _____ for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am _____ and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be. **(John 14:1-3)**

2. who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the _____ as you watched Him going into heaven." **(Acts 1:11)**

3. because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with ***the*** voice of an archangel and with ***the*** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will _____; then we who are living, who remain, will be _____ together with them in ***the*** clouds to meet the Lord in ***the*** air; and so we will always be with ***the*** Lord. Therefore _____ one another with these words. **(1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)**

4. because God did not appoint us for _____, but for obtaining _____ through our Lord Jesus Christ **(1 Thessalonians 5:9)**

Think It Through

1. How does the promise that Jesus is coming back make you feel? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. How does this hope change the way a Christian grieves?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. If you knew Jesus would come back next week, what would you want to change or do before then?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Look back over all twelve lessons. What is the most important thing you have learned? What is your next step?

_____

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be.

John 14:3

One Step This Week Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 every day this week. Then share it with someone who is grieving or afraid of the future.

Want to Go Deeper? Read Living in Hope of the Return of Christ, The Last Days and The Last Days at a Glance, free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that You are coming back for me. Keep me ready. Use this hope to comfort me, to make me more like You, and to send me out to tell others while there is still time. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

My Notes

A Closing Word

> *being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete* ***it*** *until* ***the*** *day of Jesus Christ*
>
> Philippians 1:6 (SLB)

You made it through all twelve lessons. That is worth celebrating. Take a minute and look back at the first page you wrote on. You have learned what it means to be saved and how to know where you stand. You have started reading the Bible and praying. You have learned who the Holy Spirit is, why baptism and Communion matter, why you need a church, how to fight temptation, how to give and how to share your faith. And you have learned that Jesus is coming back.

That is a strong foundation. But it is a foundation, not the whole house. Here is what I would encourage you to do next.

1. **Keep reading.** If you finished the Gospel of John, keep going with Mark, Acts and Romans. When you are ready, try reading through the whole Bible in a year.
2. **Stay connected.** Keep meeting with your church, your small group or your mentor. Do not drift off alone.
3. **Review your memory verses.** Use the cards on the next pages. Go through all twelve once a week for the next month.
4. **Help someone else.** In a year, you could be the mentor walking a new believer through this same book.
5. **Be patient.** Some days you will feel strong and some days you will feel like you are going backward. God is not finished with you. He finishes what He starts.

When I look back over my own life, I see a boy who trusted Jesus in a little church in Victorville, a man who wandered more than once, and a God who never let go. He did not give up on me, and He will not give up on you.

> *Father, thank You for every person who has worked through these lessons. Keep them close to You. Give them a hunger for Your Word, a love for Your people and a boldness to tell others. Finish the good work You have started in them. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Memory Verse Cards

Copy these onto index cards, or photocopy this page and cut along the lines. Keep them in your pocket, on your mirror or by your bed. Review them often.

MEMORY VERSE

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

Ephesians 2:8-9

MEMORY VERSE

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.

1 John 5:13

MEMORY VERSE

*Every Scripture **is** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which **is** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

MEMORY VERSE

Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

MEMORY VERSE

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such **things** there is no law.*

Galatians 5:22-23

MEMORY VERSE

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of **the** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.*

Romans 6:4

MEMORY VERSE

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.

1 Corinthians 11:26

MEMORY VERSE

*and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as **is the** custom of some, but encouraging **one another**, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.*

Hebrews 10:24-25

MEMORY VERSE

*No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God **is** faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure **it**.*

1 Corinthians 10:13

MEMORY VERSE

*Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

2 Corinthians 9:7

MEMORY VERSE

*but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **be** ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear*

1 Peter 3:15

MEMORY VERSE

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be.

John 14:3

Notes for Group Leaders

Thank you for walking with new believers. Few things are more important in the life of a church. Here are some suggestions for using this book with a group or with one person.

Before You Start

- **Keep the group small.** Four to ten people works well. One-on-one mentoring works even better.
- **Plan for twelve weeks.** One lesson a week. Some groups add a first week to get to know each other and a last week to celebrate.
- **Ask members to work through the lesson before you meet.** The fill-in questions and the Think It Through questions are their homework.
- **Have extra Bibles and pens.** Do not assume everyone owns a Bible.

A Simple Meeting Plan (about 75 minutes)

Time	What to do
10 minutes	Welcome and a snack. Let people talk.
5 minutes	Open in prayer. Ask how last week's step went.
10 minutes	Say the memory verse together. Read the main passage out loud.
35 minutes	Talk through the Think It Through questions. Use the teaching to fill in gaps.
10 minutes	Read this week's step together. Ask each person what they will do.
5 minutes	Close in prayer, using the prayer at the end of the lesson or your own.

Tips for Good Discussion

- Ask, then wait. Silence is all right. People need time to think.
- Do not answer your own questions. Let the group work at it.
- Thank people for honest answers, even when they are not quite right. Then gently point to what the Bible says.
- Watch the clock. Do not let one person or one question take the whole time.
- Keep what is shared in the group private.

Lessons That Need Extra Care

- **Lesson 1 and Lesson 2:** Someone in your group may realize they have never actually trusted Christ. Be ready to talk with them privately and pray with them.
- **Lesson 6 (Baptism) and Lesson 7 (Communion):** Know how your church practices these, and invite your pastor to visit if you can. Help anyone who wants to be baptized take the next step.

- **Lesson 9 (Sin and Temptation):** People may share hard things. Thank them, pray for them and follow up. If someone is in danger, or is struggling with an addiction, help them get further help through your pastor or a Christ-centered recovery program.
- **Lesson 12 (The Return of Christ):** Stay with the main points everyone agrees on. Do not let the group get stuck debating timelines.
- **Lesson 10 (Giving):** Some members may be in real financial trouble. Be sensitive, and point them to practical help.

After the Course

Celebrate. Then help each person take a next step: a small group, a place to serve, a Bible reading plan, or a book study. If someone is ready, invite them to help lead the next group.

Answer Key

These are the answers to the Fill It In questions. Each answer is taken word for word from the Steadfast Literal Bible.

Lesson 1: Coming Home: How You Are Saved

1. Romans 3:23: sinned; glory
2. Romans 6:23: wages; gift; eternal life
3. Ephesians 2:8-9: grace; faith; works
4. 2 Corinthians 5:17: new creation; new

Lesson 2: Knowing Where You Stand: Assurance

1. 1 John 5:11-13: eternal life; Son; know
2. John 10:27-29: voice; never perish; snatch
3. Romans 8:1: no condemnation
4. Philippians 1:6: good work; complete

Lesson 3: God's Word to You: The Bible

1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17: God-breathed; teaching; complete
2. Psalm 119:105: lamp; light
3. Hebrews 4:12: living; active; sword
4. James 1:22: doers; hearers

Lesson 4: Talking with Your Father: Prayer

1. Matthew 6:6: inner room; secret
2. Philippians 4:6-7: nothing; thanksgiving; peace
3. 1 John 5:14-15: confidence; will; hears
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: Rejoice; unceasingly; thanks

Lesson 5: God Living in You: The Holy Spirit

1. John 14:16-17: Helper; forever; in you
2. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: temple; price
3. Ephesians 1:13-14: sealed; pledge
4. Galatians 5:22-23: love; peace; self-control

Lesson 6: Going Public: Baptism

1. Matthew 28:19-20: disciples; baptizing; teaching
2. Romans 6:3-4: buried; newness of life
3. Galatians 3:27: put on Christ

Lesson 7: Remembering Him: Communion

1. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: remembrance; new covenant; until He comes
2. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: sharing; one body

3. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29: examine

Lesson 8: You Belong: The Church

1. Acts 2:42-47: teaching; fellowship; prayers
2. 1 Corinthians 12:27: body of Christ
3. 1 Peter 4:10: gift; stewards
4. Hebrews 10:24-25: stirring up; forsaking

Lesson 9: Fighting the Good Fight: Sin and Temptation

1. 1 Corinthians 10:13: faithful; way out
2. James 1:13-15: own desire; sin
3. 1 John 1:8-9: confess; forgive; cleanse
4. James 4:7: Resist; flee

Lesson 10: Open Hands: Giving

1. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8: sparingly; purposes; cheerful giver
2. Matthew 6:19-21: treasures in heaven; heart
3. Acts 20:35: more blessed

Lesson 11: Telling Your Story: Sharing Your Faith

1. Romans 1:16: ashamed; power
2. 1 Peter 3:15: ready; hope; gentleness
3. Mark 5:19: report; mercy
4. 2 Corinthians 5:20: ambassadors; reconciled

Lesson 12: Living in Hope: The Return of Christ

1. John 14:1-3: troubled; prepare a place; coming again
2. Acts 1:11: same manner
3. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18: rise first; caught away; encourage
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:9: wrath; salvation

About This Book

Christianity 101 is a 12-lesson course for new believers. It walks through the basics of the Christian life in order: salvation, assurance, the Bible, prayer, the Holy Spirit, baptism, communion, the church, sin and temptation, giving, sharing your faith, and the return of Christ.

Each lesson includes a key Bible passage printed in full, plain teaching, fill-in-the-blank questions with an answer key, questions to think through with room to write, a memory verse, one simple action step and a closing prayer. Notes for group leaders and memory verse cards are at the back.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.