A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

New Life in Christ

Starting Out with Christ · Book 8



Understanding the gift of salvation

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Trinfinity
Enterprises

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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.

Introduction

A person can know the language of church and still need to understand what Jesus means by new life. That is where I want to begin. My hope is that we will look carefully at what Jesus said, understand the gift He offers, and respond to Him with faith. I will keep it simple. The good news is clear enough to stand on its own.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, and Pastor Jimmy Carter led me to Christ when I was a boy in Victorville. Still, I drifted from God more than once through my own bad choices. When I finally gave Him every area of my life, new life in Christ stopped being church words and became real. I wrote this book to show what that new life looks like in plain steps.

1 A conversation worth hearing

> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God."*
>
> **John 3:3 (SLB)**

John 3 (SLB) introduces Nicodemus as a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. He comes to Jesus at night and recognizes that the signs Jesus performs point to God's presence. The encounter gives us enough to see that religious knowledge and a respected position do not remove our need for what Jesus offers.

Jesus goes directly to the issue of new birth. Nicodemus has religious knowledge and a place in his

community, but Jesus tells him he must be born from above (John 3:3, 7, SLB). Many Bibles say "born again." The Greek word can carry both ideas. His position cannot do that for him. Neither can ours. Familiarity with religious things should lead us toward Christ, rather than give us a reason to avoid examining our own response to Him.

Nicodemus struggles to understand. Jesus is speaking about the work of the Spirit, while Nicodemus initially thinks about physical birth. Reading the conversation as a whole keeps us from treating one familiar verse as an isolated slogan. The subject is God's work of bringing life where we cannot produce it for ourselves.

I want to approach this conversation with that same willingness to listen. Being able to ask religious questions is useful. Being willing to receive Jesus' answer is essential. Our confidence belongs in Him, rather than in how much we already know.

When I was growing up in Victorville, I mowed Pastor Jimmy Carter's lawn. That job led to him taking me to church and to me meeting Christ. One neighbor taking time with a kid changed the direction of my life. A real conversation about Christ does not need fancy words, just honesty and care.

2 The gift God gives

> *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 (SLB)**

John 3:16 (SLB) puts God's love and God's gift before us. The Son is given so that the one who believes in Him will have eternal life. The center of the passage is Jesus Himself. Our hope rests in who He is and what He has done, rather than in our ability to make ourselves acceptable to God.

I believe Jesus is the only way to the Father. That conviction should make me grateful and willing to speak clearly about Him. It should also keep me humble. I am pointing people toward a gift I need myself. I have no grounds to act as though salvation proves I am better than someone else.

Believing in Christ is personal. A family background, a church membership, or somebody else's faith cannot stand in for my own response to Him. At the same time, I should be careful not to turn salvation into a complicated procedure that the passage does not give. The call is to believe in the Son.

The surrounding verses also take unbelief seriously. God's love does not make our response unimportant. The gift is offered in a world that needs rescue. I want to speak about both the love and the need honestly, without exaggerating and without promising what Jesus did not promise.

On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me drinking and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. She had every reason to walk away, and she stayed and pointed me toward help. Grace I did not deserve, in my own home, helped me understand the free gift God offers (Ephesians 2:8-9).

3 Faith and the life that follows

James 2:14-26 (SLB) challenges a profession of faith that produces no response to another person's need. Romans 4:13-16 (SLB) directs our attention to God's promise received through faith. I want to hear both passages in context. Good works cannot purchase God's gift, and living faith should show itself in the way we live.

There is an order here worth keeping clear. Faith in Christ comes first. Obedience follows as the response of a person learning to trust Him. When I reverse that order, I begin treating my performance as the basis of my relationship with God. When I ignore obedience altogether, I avoid what Scripture says about the fruit of faith.

This affects ordinary decisions. I may need to tell the truth when a lie would protect my reputation. I may need to make time for somebody who has a real need. I may need to stop defending conduct I already know is wrong. These actions do not buy salvation. They reveal where I am learning to place my trust.

Growth does not mean I will never fail. It does mean I should stop making peace with failure. When God exposes sin, the right response is to turn toward Him. He is the One I need in the beginning, and He remains the One I need as I grow.

Going through a 12-step program showed me how much people need recovery rooted in Scripture. That is why I wrote New Beginnings, a Christ-centered 12-step course. Real faith always produces a changed

life. Saving faith is never dead, because God's Spirit goes to work inside us.

4 Coming into the light

> *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 1:9 (SLB)**

First John 1:5-10 (SLB) speaks about walking in the light and being honest about sin. Confession is not a way of informing God about something He missed. It is agreeing with Him instead of hiding behind excuses. I can come to Him because He is faithful, not because I have found a way to make my sin sound small.

A prayer can express a person's faith and repentance. I should never present a particular set of words as a formula that saves apart from Christ. The Savior is Jesus. Prayer is our response to Him. When I help someone understand the gospel, I want that person's confidence to rest in the Lord, rather than in having repeated my words correctly.

The next step is to begin learning from Him. Read His Word. Pray honestly. Become part of a church where Scripture is taught and believers help one another grow. Ask questions when something is unclear. A new believer needs patient encouragement, not the impression that every difficulty should disappear immediately.

My desire is that we would receive God's gift with gratitude and live in a way that points back to the Giver. Eternal life is too important to reduce to a religious label. Jesus calls us to Himself. The response I want to make, and the response I want to encourage in others, is a life of faith in Him.

For years I was a functioning alcoholic. I did well at work and hid my drinking. I denied I had a problem until my wife caught me on May 29, 2020. She waited in the truck while I went into my first 12-step meeting, drunk, and I wept the whole time. Bringing it into the open was painful, and it was the moment healing began. Hiding in the dark is what keeps us sick.

New Life in Christ

✦ ✦ ✦

What does Jesus mean when He says a person must be born again? In this short book I walk through His conversation with Nicodemus, the gift God offers, and what faith looks like once it takes hold. You do not need a church background to read it. It is an honest look at what Jesus said and what it means for you.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God."

John 3:3 (SLB)

Book 8 of 11 in the collection Starting Out with Christ

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