THE ROAD HOME

God's Plan of Salvation and the Life That Follows



Made by God, lost in sin, brought home by grace, and saved for a life that follows Jesus

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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.

Contents

Before You Begin....1

Part One: God's Plan

Chapter 1: Made by God, Made for God....5
Chapter 2: What Went Wrong....9
Chapter 3: A Promise Kept Through the Ages....14
Chapter 4: Jesus: God's Answer....19

Part Two: The Road to Salvation

Chapter 5: Grace: A Gift You Cannot Earn....25
Chapter 6: What Must I Do to Be Saved?....29
Chapter 7: Born Again: What God Does When You Believe....34
Chapter 8: Can I Know I Am Saved?....39

Part Three: Living Out God's Plan

Chapter 9: Saved for Good Works....45
Chapter 10: Baptism: Your First Step of Obedience....50
Chapter 11: The Church: You Belong to a Family....55
Chapter 12: Prayer and God's Word: Growing Closer to God....60
Chapter 13: Walking in the Spirit and Serving Others....65
Chapter 14: Telling Others and Living for Eternity....70
A Closing Word: Welcome Home....75
Appendix A: The Road Home at a Glance....76
Appendix B: Your First Thirty Days....78
Appendix C: Words to Know....80
About This Book....82

Before You Begin

for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which has been lost.

Luke 19:10 (SLB)

Every person who has ever lived has asked some form of the same questions. Where did I come from? Why am I here? What is wrong with me and with the world? Is there any way to make it right? What happens when I die?

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, yet I drifted from Him more than once through my own bad choices. Every time, God drew me back. I wrote this book for anyone starting out with Jesus or wondering whether they have strayed too far to come back. No matter how many detours you have taken, the road home is open through Christ.

The Bible answers every one of those questions, and the answers all point to one place. God made you on purpose. Sin broke the relationship you were made for. God Himself made a way back through His Son, Jesus Christ. And once you come home to Him, He has a plan for the rest of your life.

That is what this book is about. It is the road home, from start to finish.

Why I Wrote This Book

People get confused about salvation, and I understand why. Some have been told they have to clean up their lives before God will take them. Some have been told that if they are good enough, show up to church enough, or give enough, God will let them into heaven. Others have been told that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. And some have prayed a prayer years ago, never saw anything change, and now wonder if any of it was real.

The Bible is clear on this. We are saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by anything we do. But the Bible is just as clear that a person who has been saved does not stay the same. God saves us for something. He gives us a new heart, a new family, and new work to do.

Those two truths belong together, and the order matters. If you get them backwards, you end up trying to earn something God offers as a free gift. If you leave out the second one, you end up with a faith that never shows up on Monday morning. I wrote this book to put them side by side, in the right order, in plain words.

Who This Book Is For

I wrote this book first for the person who is asking, "How can I be right with God?" Maybe you didn't grow up in church. Maybe you did, and you heard the words but never understood them. Maybe you are carrying something you think God could never forgive. If that is you, start at Chapter 1 and read straight through. You don't need any background. I'll explain every term as we go.

I also wrote it for the new believer who has just trusted Christ and is asking, "Now what?" Part Three is written for you. It covers baptism, the church, prayer, the Bible, living by the Spirit, serving, and telling others, along with why each one matters.

And I wrote it for the believer who has walked with Jesus for years and wants to explain the gospel clearly to a friend, a son or daughter, or a small group. This book can be a tool in your hands. Read it with someone.

How the Book Is Laid Out

The book has three parts.

Part One: God's Plan starts at the beginning. Why did God make us? What went wrong? How did God promise a rescue through the whole Old Testament, and how did He keep that promise in Jesus?

Part Two: The Road to Salvation answers the most important question a person can ask: "What must I do to be saved?" It explains grace, repentance, and faith, what God does inside a person the moment they believe, and how you can know you are saved.

Part Three: Living Out God's Plan is about the life that follows. None of these things save you. You do them because you are saved, and because God has a plan for your life that He wants you to walk in.

Every chapter ends with **Study Questions** for personal reflection or group discussion, and **Take the Next Step**, one simple thing to do before you read the next chapter. At the back you'll find a one-page summary of the road home with the key verses, a plan for your first thirty days as a believer, and a list of words to know.

Using This Book With a Group

This book works well for a new believers class, a small group, or two friends meeting over coffee. Here are a few simple ways to use it.

A fourteen-week group. Read one chapter a week. Spend most of your time on the Study Questions, and close by having each person say which next step they will take. Start the next meeting by asking how it went.

A seven-week class. Take two chapters each week. Week one covers Chapters 1 and 2, week two covers Chapters 3 and 4, and so on. This pace works well for a new members or new believers class at church.

One-on-one. If you are helping a friend who just came to faith, read a chapter apiece and meet to talk it over. Skip the questions that don't fit, and keep the next step.

A word to group leaders: some people in your group may not be saved yet, even if they have been in church for years. Chapter 6 asks the reader to respond to the gospel. Give people room to think, and make yourself available afterward to talk privately. Never pressure anyone. The Holy Spirit is the One who draws people to Christ. Our job is to tell the truth plainly and lovingly.

A Few Notes Before We Start

Scripture quotations in this book come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words set in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. When I don't quote a passage, I give the reference so you can read it for yourself, and I hope you will. Don't take my word for anything in this book. Open your Bible and check it, the way the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

I capitalize the pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (He, Him, His, You, Your) as a sign of reverence. Inside a Scripture quotation, I leave the capitals exactly as the translation prints them.

When I describe a person by name in these pages, like "Picture a woman named Linda," I am painting a picture to make a point. Those people are examples, not real people.

Where good Bible-believing Christians disagree on a question, I will tell you so, give the main views fairly, and tell you where I land and why. On the central truth of this book, there is no disagreement among those who take the Bible at its word: salvation is God's free gift, received by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Whole Book in One Paragraph

If you only read one paragraph of this book, read this one. God made you to know Him and enjoy Him forever. Every one of us has sinned and broken that relationship, and the penalty for sin is death, separation from God. We cannot fix that by being good. But God loved us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, who lived a sinless life, died on the cross in our place to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead on the third day. God now offers forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift to everyone who turns from their sin and puts their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When you do, God makes you new, adopts you into His family, gives you His Holy Spirit, and begins to shape your life according to His plan. You follow Him, not to be saved, but because you are.

Let's start at the beginning.

Part One: God’s Plan

Chapter 1: Made by God, Made for God

> *"Worthy are You, Lord, to receive the glory and the honor and the power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they are and were created."*
>
> Revelation 4:11 (SLB)

If you want to understand salvation, you have to start before the problem. You have to start with God, and with why He made us at all. A rescue only makes sense when you know what was lost.

So before we talk about sin, the cross, or what a person must do to be saved, let's go back to the first page of the Bible.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember. When Pastor Jimmy Carter took me to church in Victorville, the message of Jesus fit what my heart had been looking for. God is not far from any of us, because He made us to seek Him (Acts 17:27).

In the Beginning, God

The Bible opens with four words that settle more questions than any philosophy book ever written.

> *In **the** beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* (Genesis 1:1)

Notice what that verse does not do. It does not try to prove that God exists. It simply starts with Him. Before there was a universe, there was God. He did not need us. He was not lonely or bored. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit lived in perfect love and fellowship before anything else existed (John 17:24). Everything that exists, from the farthest star to the cells in your body, exists because He spoke it into being.

That matters for salvation, because it means God is not a part of the world we can manage or bargain with. He is the Creator, and we are the creatures. He owns everything, including us. He sets the terms. When we come to Him, we come on His terms, not ours.

That might sound cold at first, but stay with me. The God who made everything is also the God who loves deeply, and the rest of this book will show you just how deeply.

Made in His Image

On the sixth day, God did something different. He made man.

> *And God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the flying things of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every moving thing that moves on the earth." And God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:26-27)

Of everything God made, only mankind is said to be made "in His image." What does that mean? Scripture doesn't give us a single definition, but it shows us enough. Being made in God's image means we are like Him in ways no animal is. We can think, reason, and create. We have a sense of right and wrong. We can love, choose, and make promises. Most of all, we can know God personally and talk with Him.

It also means every human being has worth. The baby in the womb, the elderly man in the nursing home, the person you can't stand at work, and the homeless woman on the corner all bear the image of God. Your worth does not come from your looks, your bank account, or your performance. It comes from the One who made you.

You might ask, "If I'm made in God's image, why do I feel so far from Him?" That is the right question, and the next chapter answers it. For now, hold on to this: you were made by God, and you were made like Him, so that you could know Him.

Made for a Relationship

Genesis 2 slows down and shows us the details. God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). He planted a garden and put the man there to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15). He made a woman and brought her to the man, and the two became one flesh (Genesis 2:22-24).

Look at the picture. God gave Adam and Eve a home, meaningful work, each other, and Himself. Genesis 3:8 tells us that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. The first people did not have to search for God. He came to them.

That is what we were made for. Not just to exist, not just to work and eat and sleep, but to walk with God. Every human heart was made with room for Him, and nothing else fills it. People try to fill that space with money, success, pleasure, relationships, substances, or religion, and they always come up empty. The problem is not that they want too much. The problem is that they are trying to fill a God-shaped space with something smaller than God.

Made for His Glory

Why did God make us? The Bible's answer is that He made us for His glory. In Isaiah 43:7, God speaks of everyone "whom I created for My glory." Colossians 1:16 says that all things were created through Christ and for Him.

> *because in Him all things were created, the **things** in the heavens and the **things** on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him.* (Colossians 1:16)

Glory is a word we don't use much anymore. It means weight, worth, and splendor. To glorify God is to show how great and good He really is. A sunset glorifies God by showing His beauty. A mountain glorifies God by showing His power. People glorify God in a deeper way, by knowing Him, loving Him, trusting Him, and obeying Him freely.

Here is the good news hidden inside that truth. God's glory and our joy are not enemies. When we live for His glory, we find the very thing we were made for. Psalm 16:11 says that in His presence there is fullness of joy. God is not a cosmic killjoy who made us to serve Him so He could feel important. He made us to share in the best thing there is, which is Himself.

God Has Not Left Himself Without a Witness

You might be thinking, "That's fine for people who believe the Bible. What about everyone else?" The Bible says God has made Himself known to every person, even those who have never opened a Bible.

> *For His invisible **things**, from **the** creation of **the** world, being understood by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divinity, for them to be without excuse*
> (Romans 1:20)

Creation itself shouts that there is a Creator. You look at the stars, a newborn baby, or the way a tree grows from a seed, and something inside you knows this didn't happen by accident. Paul says that witness is clear enough that no one has an excuse.

God has also put a conscience in every person (Romans 2:14-15). People in every culture know that murder, stealing, and betrayal are wrong. That inner sense of right and wrong points to a moral Lawgiver.

When Paul preached to the philosophers in Athens, he told them that God made every nation of men so that they would seek Him, "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). That is still true. God is not hiding. He wants to be found.

What This Means for You

Let me bring this home before we move on.

First, you are not an accident. Whatever the circumstances of your birth, God knew you before you were born (Psalm 139:13-16). You were made on purpose.

Second, you were made for God. Your deepest longings, for love, for meaning, for a home that lasts, are longings that only He can satisfy.

Third, God is the one who sets the terms of our relationship with Him. That is not bad news. A God who is great enough to make everything is great enough to save you, and good enough to want to.

But something has gone terribly wrong. You can feel it in the world, and if you are honest, you can feel it in your own heart. That is where we turn next.

Study Questions

1. Read Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 4:11. What do these verses say about who God is and who we are?
2. What does it mean to you that every person is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)? How should that change the way you treat people?
3. In Genesis 2, God gave Adam and Eve a home, work, each other, and Himself. Which of those do you think people most often try to use in place of God?

4. What are some things people use to try to fill the empty place in their hearts? Have you tried any of them?
5. Read Romans 1:20. What in creation makes you most aware that God is real?
6. Acts 17:27 says God "is not far from each one of us." Have there been times in your life when you sensed God was close, even before you knew Him?
7. Colossians 1:16 says all things were created for Christ. What would change in your week if you really believed you were made for Him?
8. What questions about God or the Bible are you hoping this book will answer?

Take the Next Step

Go outside tonight, or find a quiet place, and spend five minutes looking at something God made: the sky, a tree, the face of someone you love. Then read Psalm 19:1-6 and Psalm 139:13-16. Write down one thing these passages tell you about the God who made you.

Chapter 2: What Went Wrong

> *But your iniquities have been separating between you and your God, and your sins have hidden **His** face from you so that **He does** not hear.*
>
> Isaiah 59:2 (SLB)

Nobody has to be taught that something is wrong with the world. Turn on the news. Look at the hospital, the prison, the divorce court, and the funeral home. Look inside your own heart on a bad day. We know things are not the way they are supposed to be.

The Bible gives that problem a name. It calls it sin. This is the hardest chapter in the book, because none of us likes to hear bad news about ourselves. But you cannot understand how good the good news is until you understand how bad the bad news is. A doctor who won't tell you about the disease can't help you with the cure.

One Command and One Choice

God gave Adam and Eve a beautiful garden and almost complete freedom. There was only one thing they were told not to do.

> *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden you may surely eat; and from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day you eat from it you shall surely die."* (Genesis 2:16-17)

God was not being stingy. He gave them every tree but one. That single command was a test of trust. Would they believe that God was good and that His word was true, or would they decide for themselves what was good and evil?

In Genesis 3, the serpent, who is Satan (Revelation 12:9), came to Eve with a question: "Has God indeed said...?" (Genesis 3:1). Then he told an outright lie: "You shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). He suggested that God was holding out on them, and that if they ate, they would be like God.

> *And the woman saw that the tree **was** good for food, and that it **was** a delight to the eyes, and the tree **was** desirable to make **one** wise; and she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.* (Genesis 3:6)

That is the root of every sin. We doubt that God is good, we decide we know better than He does, and we reach for what He told us not to take. Adam and Eve were not tricked into eating a piece of fruit by accident. They chose to put their own judgment above God's word.

What Sin Did

The results came right away. Their eyes were opened, and the first thing they felt was shame. They sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. Then they heard God walking in the garden, and they hid among the trees (Genesis 3:7-8).

Think about that. The God they had walked with was coming to meet them, and for the first time they were afraid of Him. God called out, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). He knew where they were. He was giving them a chance to come out and be honest.

Instead, they made excuses. Adam blamed Eve, and in the same breath he blamed God for giving her to him. Eve blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:12-13). Nothing has changed. People still hide, still cover up, and still blame everyone else.

Sin broke everything it touched. It broke their relationship with God, so they were afraid of Him. It broke their relationship with each other, so they blamed each other. It broke their relationship with the world, so work became painful toil and the ground produced thorns (Genesis 3:17-19). Worst of all, it brought death. God had said, “in the day you eat from it you shall surely die.” Their bodies began to die that day, and they were cast out of the garden, cut off from the tree of life and from the close fellowship they had known with God (Genesis 3:22-24).

Sin Passed Down to All of Us

You might say, “That was Adam’s problem. Why should it be mine?” The Bible says Adam’s sin did not stay with Adam.

> *Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed to all men, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12)

Adam was the head of the human race. When he fell, all of us fell with him. Every one of his children was born with the same broken nature. Theologians call this “original sin,” but you don’t need a theology degree to see it. Nobody has to teach a two-year-old to say “mine,” to lie, or to throw a fit. It comes naturally.

And lest anyone think they are the exception, notice the last words of that verse: “because all sinned.” We are not only born with a sinful nature. Each of us has also chosen to sin, over and over. We can’t blame it all on Adam.

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

“All” means all. The good neighbor, the faithful churchgoer, the kind grandmother, the criminal on death row, and you and me. Some people have sinned more visibly than others, but every one of us falls short of God’s standard.

What Sin Really Is

We tend to think of sin as a short list of really bad things, like murder or robbing a bank. If we haven’t done those, we figure we’re doing pretty well. The Bible sees it differently.

The most common Greek word for sin in the New Testament, hamartia, carries the idea of missing the mark, like an archer whose arrow falls short of the target. God’s standard is His own perfect holiness. Anything less is sin.

Sin is also rebellion. First John 3:4 says, “sin is lawlessness.” It is deciding that God’s rules don’t apply to me, and that I will be the one in charge of my life.

Jesus made it even more personal. He said that hatred in the heart is the root of murder, and lust in the heart is adultery (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28). He said that evil thoughts, greed, deceit, pride, and every other kind of sin come from within, “out of the heart of men” (Mark 7:21). Our problem is not just what we do. It is who we are on the inside.

You might ask, “Do I really have to be perfect?” Here is how James puts it.

> *For whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one **point**, he has become guilty of all.*
> (James 2:10)

Picture a man hanging over a cliff by a chain with ten links. How many links have to break for him to fall? Only one. God’s law works the same way. You don’t have to break all ten commandments to be a lawbreaker. One is enough. And if we are honest, every one of us has broken far more than one.

The Price of Sin

Here is the hardest truth in this chapter.

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

A wage is what you earn. You work, and at the end of the week you are paid what you have coming. Paul says that what sin earns is death. That means physical death, the separation of the soul from the body. It also means spiritual death, separation from God, now and forever.

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. Isaiah says our sins have separated us from God. It is not that God moved away from us. Our sin built a wall between us and Him. Ephesians 2:1 says that before we came to Christ, we were “dead in the trespasses and the sins.” Not sick, not wounded, but dead. A dead man cannot help himself.

The Bible is also clear that there is a judgment coming. Hebrews 9:27 says, “it is appointed to men to die once, and after this judgment.” God is holy and just. He cannot simply overlook sin any more than a good judge can let a guilty man walk out of the courtroom because he seems sorry. Jesus spoke plainly about hell more than anyone else in the Bible, because He loved people enough to warn them (Matthew 10:28; 25:46).

We Can’t Fix It Ourselves

When people realize they have a sin problem, most try to fix it on their own. They promise to do better. They go to church, give money, volunteer, or try to make up for what they’ve done by doing more good than bad.

The Bible says none of that works. Isaiah 64:6 says even our righteous deeds are like a stained, filthy garment in God’s sight. That doesn’t mean doing good is worthless. It means our best efforts cannot pay

for our sin or make us clean before a holy God. Romans 3:20 says, “by works of law no flesh will be justified before Him.”

Think of it this way. If you robbed a bank and later volunteered at a soup kitchen every weekend for a year, your service would be a good thing, but it would not erase the robbery. The debt would still be on the books. Our good deeds cannot cancel our sin, because we already owed God perfect obedience to begin with.

So why did God give us His law, if no one can keep it? Galatians 3:24 says the law became a “child-guardian to Christ.” The law is like a mirror. A mirror can show you that your face is dirty, but you can’t wash your face with it. The law shows us our sin so that we will run to the only One who can wash it away.

The Bad News Is Not the Last Word

If this were the end of the story, it would be hopeless. But it isn’t.

Go back to the garden for a moment. Before Adam and Eve were sent out, God did two things that tell us everything about His heart. First, He came looking for them. He called, “Where are you?” Sinners were hiding, and God went seeking. Second, God made garments of skin and clothed them (Genesis 3:21). Something had to die so their shame could be covered. It was the first picture of what God would one day do for the whole world through His Son.

Look again at Romans 6:23. It doesn’t end with death. “But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The wage of sin is death, and we earned it. Eternal life is a gift, and we could never earn it.

In the next chapter, we’ll trace how God promised that gift from the very first pages of the Bible, and how He kept that promise.

Study Questions

1. Read Genesis 3:1-6. How did the serpent get Eve to doubt God’s word and God’s goodness? How does temptation still work the same way today?
2. After they sinned, Adam and Eve hid, covered up, and blamed others (Genesis 3:7-13). Which of those do you tend to do when you have done wrong?
3. Read Romans 3:23 and James 2:10. Why do you think people find it so hard to admit they are sinners?
4. Jesus taught that sin starts in the heart (Mark 7:21-23). How does that change the way you think about your own sin?
5. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. What is the difference between a wage and a gift?
6. Why can’t our good deeds cancel out our sin? Use the bank robbery picture or one of your own.
7. Galatians 3:24 says the law leads us to Christ. How has God’s law shown you your need for Him?
8. In Genesis 3:9 and 3:21, what do you learn about God’s heart toward sinners, even right after the first sin?

Take the Next Step

Read Psalm 51, which David wrote after he committed adultery and murder. Then take ten minutes alone and be honest with God about your own sin. You don't need fancy words. Just tell Him the truth. Don't stop there, though. Finish by reading Romans 5:8 and thanking God that the story doesn't end with our sin.

Chapter 3: A Promise Kept Through the Ages

> *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, so that He might redeem those under law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.*
>
> Galatians 4:4-5 (SLB)

Salvation was not God's backup plan. He didn't look down after the first sin, scratch His head, and come up with a fix. First Peter 1:20 says Christ was "foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world." Before God ever said, "Let there be light," He knew the cost of saving us, and He chose to pay it.

That is why the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, tells one story. The Old Testament is not a different religion from the New. It is the long build-up to the coming of Jesus. On the road to Emmaus, after His resurrection, Jesus walked with two discouraged disciples and opened the Scriptures to them.

> *And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, He was explaining to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* (Luke 24:27)

In this chapter, we'll walk a little of that same road. We won't cover everything, but you'll see how God kept pointing ahead to His Son, again and again, for thousands of years.

When I faced the truth about my choices in May 2020, I saw that "I will do better next time" could never erase what was done. Real guilt needs a real payment. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Every Old Testament sacrifice pointed to Jesus, who paid our debt in full.

The First Promise

The first promise of a Savior came in the same chapter as the first sin. God spoke to the serpent with Adam and Eve standing there.

> *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you **on the** head, and you shall bruise him **on the** heel.* (Genesis 3:15)

Bible teachers have long called this verse the first gospel. God promised that a descendant of the woman, her "seed," would one day crush the serpent's head. The serpent would strike His heel, a painful wound but not a fatal one. The serpent's wound would be to the head, a death blow.

That is a picture of the cross. At Calvary, Satan struck at Jesus, and Jesus suffered and died. But three days later He rose, and by His death and resurrection He broke Satan's power over everyone who belongs to Him (Hebrews 2:14-15; Colossians 2:15). Notice also that the promise is about the seed of the woman. Bible family lines are normally traced through the father. This one quiet detail looks ahead to a Child who would be born of a virgin.

A Covering of Blood

Right after that promise, God clothed Adam and Eve with garments of skin (Genesis 3:21). An animal died so they could be covered. In the next chapter, their son Abel brought a lamb as an offering, and God accepted it (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4).

From the beginning, God was teaching a lesson He would repeat for centuries. Sin brings death, and the only way for a sinner to be covered is for a substitute to die in his place. God put it plainly in the law of Moses.

> *For the life of the flesh **is** in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it **is** the blood **that** makes atonement by the life.* (Leviticus 17:11)

The word atonement means a covering for sin that brings a sinner back to God. Hebrews 9:22 says, "apart from shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." That can sound strange to modern ears, but think about what sin earns. If the wage of sin is death, then forgiveness costs a life. Someone has to pay.

The Promise to Abraham

About two thousand years before Christ, God called a man named Abram out of the city of Ur and made him a remarkable promise.

> *And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.* (Genesis 12:2-3)

God promised to make Abram (later renamed Abraham) into a great nation, the people of Israel. But look at the last line. God would bless "all the families of the earth" through him. Paul says this promise was the gospel preached ahead of time (Galatians 3:8). The blessing would come through one of Abraham's descendants, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Abraham also shows us how a person is made right with God. Genesis 15:6 says Abraham believed the LORD, and God counted it to him as righteousness. He wasn't made right with God by keeping the law, which hadn't been given yet, or by circumcision, which came later (Romans 4:9-11). He was made right with God by believing God's promise. That is still how it works today.

God Will Provide the Lamb

Years later, God tested Abraham in a way that is hard to read. He told Abraham to take his son Isaac, the son of the promise, up a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. As they climbed, Isaac asked a question.

> *And Isaac said to Abraham his father, and he said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, and where **is** the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God will see to the lamb for Himself for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went together.* (Genesis 22:7-8)

Abraham believed that God would keep His promise, even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). At the last moment, God stopped Abraham's hand and provided a ram caught in a thicket. Abraham offered it "in place of his son" (Genesis 22:13).

Many Bible teachers believe this happened on the same ridge where Jerusalem would later stand, because Genesis 22:2 names it as the land of Moriah, and 2 Chronicles 3:1 says Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah. Whether or not it is the exact spot, the picture is unmistakable. A father leading his only son up a hill, the son carrying the wood on his back, a substitute dying in his place. Two thousand years later, God the Father did what He spared Abraham from doing. He gave His own Son.

The Passover Lamb

Fast forward several hundred years. Abraham's descendants were slaves in Egypt. God sent ten plagues on Egypt, and the last one was the death of every firstborn son. But God gave His people a way of escape. Each family was to kill a spotless lamb and put its blood on the doorposts of their house.

> *And the blood shall be for you for a sign on the houses where you **are**; and I will see the blood, and I will pass over you, and **there** shall not be among you a plague for destruction when I strike in the land of Egypt.* (Exodus 12:13)

God didn't say, "When I see how good you've been, I will pass over you." He said, "I will see the blood." What saved a family that night was not their goodness but the blood of the lamb, applied by faith.

The New Testament makes the connection plain. Paul calls Christ "our Passover" who was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). And Jesus died in Jerusalem during the Passover feast.

Sacrifices That Pointed Ahead

At Mount Sinai, God gave Israel His law, the tabernacle, the priesthood, and a whole system of sacrifices. Every day, every year, animals were offered for sin. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood to cover the sins of the nation (Leviticus 16).

Those sacrifices were real, and God commanded them. But they could never finish the job.

> *For **it is** impossible **for the** blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins.* (Hebrews 10:4)

So what were they for? They were pictures and pointers. Every lamb that died taught Israel that sin is serious and that a substitute was needed. And every new sacrifice the next day said, "This isn't finished yet. Someone better is coming."

The Prophets Saw Him Coming

As the centuries went on, God gave His prophets more and more detail about the Savior who was coming. Here are only a few of them.

- He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23).
- He would be born in Bethlehem, though His goings out are from days of old (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1-6).

- He would be a descendant of King David and reign on David's throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33).
- He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:4-5).
- His hands and feet would be pierced, and men would cast lots for His clothing (Psalm 22:16-18; John 19:23-24).
- He would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:29-32).

The clearest picture of all is in Isaiah 53, written about seven hundred years before Jesus was born. Read it slowly.

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us. All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.* (Isaiah 53:5-6)

Look at who does what. We went astray. We turned to our own way. The iniquity was ours. But He was pierced. He was crushed. The LORD laid our iniquity on Him. That is substitution, one dying in the place of others. Isaiah goes on to say that He would be led like a lamb to the slaughter and stay silent (Isaiah 53:7), that His grave would be assigned with the wicked and with a rich man in His death (Isaiah 53:9), and that after the labor of His soul He would see and be satisfied, and would justify many by bearing their iniquities (Isaiah 53:11). In Acts 8, an Ethiopian official was reading this chapter in his chariot, and Philip "preached Jesus as the gospel to him" starting from this very passage (Acts 8:35).

A New Covenant

God also promised something the old sacrifices could never do. Through the prophet Jeremiah, He said that one day He would make a new covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement. Under the new covenant, God would write His law on people's hearts, and He would forgive their sins and remember them no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

On the night before He died, Jesus took a cup at the Passover meal and said it was the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). The promise Jeremiah saw from far away was about to be kept.

When the Time Had Fully Come

Read the verse at the top of this chapter again. "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son." God was never late. Every promise, every lamb, every prophecy was moving history toward one moment in a small town called Bethlehem.

For thousands of years, God's people looked forward to the Savior and were saved by trusting God's promise, as Abraham was (Romans 4:3; Hebrews 11:13). Since the cross, we look back to the Savior who has come and are saved by trusting the same God, who kept His word. Either way, it is the same road home, through the same Savior.

In the next chapter, we'll meet Him.

Study Questions

1. Read Genesis 3:15. What did God promise, and how does the cross fulfill it?
2. Why do you think God taught His people for so long that a substitute had to die for sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22)?
3. Read Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:3. How was Abraham made right with God? Why does that matter for us?
4. What parts of the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 remind you of what God did for us in Jesus?
5. On the night of the Passover, what saved a family from judgment (Exodus 12:13)? How is that a picture of salvation in Christ?
6. If the Old Testament sacrifices could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), why did God command them?
7. Read Isaiah 53:3-7 out loud. Which line strikes you the most, and why?
8. How does seeing God's plan running through the whole Bible affect your trust in His promises to you?

Take the Next Step

Read Isaiah 53 in one sitting. Then read Luke 23:26-49, the account of Jesus' crucifixion. Make a list of every detail you notice in Luke that Isaiah foretold seven hundred years earlier.

Chapter 4: Jesus: God's Answer

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

Everything in the first three chapters has been leading to one Person. God made us for Himself. Sin separated us from Him and earned us death. God promised a Savior and painted His picture for thousands of years. Now the Savior has come, and His name is Jesus.

When an angel told Joseph what to name the Child, he also explained what the name meant.

> *And she will bear a son, and you will call His name Jesus, for He Himself will save His people from their sins.* (Matthew 1:21)

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua (Joshua), which means "the LORD saves." His name is His mission. In this chapter, we'll look at who Jesus is, what He did, and why He is the only way home.

Who Is Jesus?

Jesus once asked His disciples what people were saying about Him. They gave Him the popular answers: a prophet, John the Baptist come back, Elijah. Then He made it personal.

> *He says to them, "But you, who do you say Me to be?" And Simon Peter, answering, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:15-16)

That is still the most important question anyone will ever answer. People today say Jesus was a good teacher, a wise man, a prophet, or a revolutionary. He was all of those things, but He was far more. The Bible teaches that Jesus is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, who became a man.

The Trinity is the Bible's teaching that there is one God who exists eternally as three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each is fully God, yet there are not three gods but one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19). We can't fully understand that, and we shouldn't expect to. If we could fit God completely inside our heads, He would be too small to save us.

John's Gospel opens with these words about Jesus, whom John calls "the Word."

> *In **the** beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in **the** beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one **thing** came into being that has come into being.* (John 1:1-3)
>
> *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from **the** Father, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14)

The One who was with God in the beginning, the One through whom all things were made, became flesh. Paul says "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus Himself said, "before

Abraham came into being, I am" (John 8:58), using the same name God gave Himself at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The religious leaders understood exactly what He was claiming, and they picked up stones to kill Him for it.

Why does it matter that Jesus is God? Because only God can save. No mere man could pay for the sins of the world. And why does it matter that He became a man? Because it was mankind that owed the debt, and it had to be a man who paid it. Jesus is the only One who is both. First Timothy 2:5 says there is "one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus." A mediator stands between two parties to bring them together. Jesus can lay one hand on God and the other on us, because He is both.

The Sinless Life

Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem, just as the prophets said. He grew up in Nazareth, worked as a carpenter, and began His public ministry at about thirty years old (Luke 3:23). For about three years, He taught, healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, and welcomed sinners.

Through all of it, He never sinned. Not once. Peter, who lived with Him day and night, said that He "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Hebrews 4:15 says He was tempted in all things as we are, "without sin." His enemies searched hard for something to accuse Him of and came up empty (John 8:46; Mark 14:55-56).

This matters more than we might think. An Old Testament lamb had to be without blemish to be offered for sin. Jesus is "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). If He had sinned even once, He would have needed a Savior Himself, and His death could not have paid for anyone else. Because He lived the perfect life we never could, He could die the death we deserved.

The Death in Our Place

On a Friday during the Passover feast, around A.D. 30 or 33 (scholars differ on the exact year), Jesus was arrested, put on trial, beaten, mocked, and crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. Crucifixion was the cruelest form of execution the Romans had. It was reserved for slaves and the worst criminals.

Jesus was not a helpless victim. He said plainly, "No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down from Myself" (John 10:18). He went to the cross on purpose. Why?

> *who Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live to righteousness; by whose wound you were healed.* (1 Peter 2:24)

> *For He made the One who did not know sin **to be** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

That second verse may be the clearest statement of what happened on the cross. Jesus, who never knew sin, was made sin for us. God laid our sin on Him and treated Him as the sinner, so that He could treat us as righteous. Christians have long called this the great exchange. He took what we had coming, and we get what He deserves.

The Bible uses a word for this that we don't hear much: propitiation (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). It means a sacrifice that satisfies God's justice and turns away His wrath against sin. God did not simply look the other way. Sin was punished, fully and finally, but it was punished in Jesus. That is how God can be both perfectly just and the One who justifies sinners (Romans 3:26).

Picture a judge whose own son stands before him, guilty of a crime with a heavy fine. The judge cannot pretend the law wasn't broken. So he pronounces the sentence, then steps down from the bench, takes off his robe, and pays the fine himself. Justice is done, and mercy is given. At the cross, God did something even greater. He paid for us with the life of His own Son.

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. God showed His love "in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't wait for us to clean up. He didn't die for good people who deserved it. He died for rebels.

It Is Finished

Just before Jesus died, He cried out a short sentence. In the Greek of the New Testament, it is only one word.

> *Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It has been finished." And having bowed **His** head, He delivered up the spirit.* (John 19:30)

The Greek word is tetelestai. It was a word used in everyday life when something was completed. Many teachers point out that it could be written on a bill that had been paid in full. Whether or not that was in John's mind, the meaning is clear. The work Jesus came to do was done. Nothing needs to be added to it. Hebrews 10:12 says He offered "one sacrifice for sins for all time" and then sat down at the right hand of God. Priests in the temple never sat down, because their work was never finished. Jesus sat down, because His was.

That has huge consequences for how a person is saved, and we'll see them in Part Two. If Jesus finished the work, then we don't add to it. We receive it.

He Is Risen

Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and laid in a new tomb belonging to a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea. A large stone was rolled across the entrance, and Roman soldiers were posted to guard it (Matthew 27:57-66).

On Sunday morning, the tomb was empty.

> *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)

Paul says he passed this on "among the first things," the things that matter most. Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day. That is the gospel, the good news, in one sentence. Paul goes on to list the people who saw the risen Jesus: Peter, the twelve disciples, more than five

hundred people at one time (most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote and could be questioned), James, all the apostles, and finally Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

The resurrection is not a side issue. Paul says, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). The resurrection proves that Jesus is who He said He was (Romans 1:4). It proves that God accepted His sacrifice. Romans 4:25 says He "was delivered over because of our trespasses, and was raised because of our justification." And it proves that death has been beaten. Because He lives, everyone who belongs to Him will live too (John 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

Forty days later, Jesus ascended into heaven in the sight of His disciples (Acts 1:9-11). Today He is at the right hand of the Father, "always living to intercede" for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). And He has promised to come again.

The Only Way

Here is where many people get uncomfortable. Jesus did not say He was one way to God among many. He said this:

> *Jesus says to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6)

Peter said the same thing to the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

> *And **there** is not salvation in any other; for neither is **there** another name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12)

People sometimes call that narrow, and it is (Matthew 7:13-14). But think about it for a minute. If there were other ways to be saved, then Jesus died for nothing. Why would the Father send His Son to the cross if being sincere or religious or good enough would do? The cross is the proof that there was no other way.

It's also worth noticing that the gate is narrow, but it is open to everyone. Jesus didn't say only the rich, the smart, the moral, or the religious could come. He said, "everyone who believes in Him" (John 3:16). The narrow gate is open to anyone who will come through it.

What Will You Do With Jesus?

When Jesus stood before Pilate, the Roman governor asked the crowd, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22). That is the question every person has to answer. You can't stay neutral about a man who claimed to be God. Either He was lying, or He was badly mistaken about Himself, or He is exactly who He said He is: the Lord.

The rest of this book assumes the third answer, because the evidence of the empty tomb, the eyewitnesses, and the changed lives of His followers points there. In Part Two, we'll look at how a person moves from knowing about Jesus to being saved by Him.

Study Questions

1. Read Matthew 16:13-16. If Jesus asked you who you say He is, how would you answer today?

2. Read John 1:1-3 and 1:14. What do these verses teach about who Jesus is?
3. Why did the Savior need to be both fully God and fully man (1 Timothy 2:5)?
4. Why does it matter that Jesus never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22)?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Put the “great exchange” into your own words.
6. What does Jesus’ cry “It has been finished” (John 19:30) mean for someone who is trying to earn God’s favor?
7. According to 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, what would be lost if Jesus had not risen from the dead?
8. Why do you think people object to Jesus being the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)? How would you answer that objection kindly?

Take the Next Step

Read the Gospel of Mark this week. It is the shortest of the four Gospels, and you can read it in about two hours, or a few chapters a day. As you read, keep a list of everything Jesus says or does that shows He is more than a man.

Part Two: The Road to Salvation

Chapter 5: Grace: A Gift You Cannot Earn

> *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 (SLB)

If you remember only one word from Part Two of this book, make it grace. It is the word that separates the gospel of Jesus Christ from every religion man has ever invented.

Every man-made religion boils down to the same idea: do enough, and God will accept you. Pray enough, give enough, keep enough rules, light enough candles, help enough people, and maybe the scales will tip your way. The gospel says the opposite. God accepts you, not because of what you do, but because of what Jesus has done. Salvation is a gift.

What Grace Means

The Greek word for grace in the New Testament is charis. It means favor, kindness, or a gift freely given. In the Bible, grace is God's kindness toward people who don't deserve it and could never repay it.

Here is a simple way to keep three words straight. Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. We deserve God's judgment. In mercy, He holds it back. In grace, He gives us forgiveness, a place in His family, and eternal life on top of that.

Paul describes it in Ephesians 2. Right after he tells us we were dead in our sins and children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3), he writes two of the most beautiful words in the Bible.

> *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even us, being dead in the trespasses, He made alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*
> (Ephesians 2:4-5)

"But God." We were dead, but God. We couldn't save ourselves, but God. Everything turns on those two words. Salvation starts with God, not us. It flows out of His mercy, His great love, and His grace.

Not From Works

Look closely at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul piles up phrases to make sure we can't miss his point. Salvation is "by grace." It is "not from yourselves." The gift "is of God." It is "not from works." And it is that way "so that no one may boast."

Paul says the same thing all over his letters.

> *not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us, through **the** washing of regeneration and renewal of **the** Holy Spirit* (Titus 3:5)

> *Now to the one who works, the wage is not reckoned according to grace but according to debt; but to the one who does not work but believes on the **One** who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness* (Romans 4:4-5)

Think about Paul's picture in Romans 4. When you work forty hours, your paycheck is not a gift. Your boss owes it to you. If salvation came by working, God would owe it to us, and we could hold out our hands at the end and say, "Pay up." But salvation does not come that way. God justifies "the ungodly," those who have nothing to bring, when they stop working for it and trust Him.

Paul even says grace and works can't be mixed. "And if by grace, it is no longer from works; otherwise grace no longer becomes grace" (Romans 11:6). It's either a gift or a wage. It can't be both. The moment you add a single work as a requirement for earning salvation, it stops being grace.

Why God Saves by Grace

You might ask, "Why would God do it this way? Wouldn't it be fair to reward people who try hard?" Here are a few reasons the Bible gives.

First, it's the only way anyone could be saved. We saw in Chapter 2 that God's standard is perfection, and no one meets it. If salvation depended on our works, heaven would be empty. Galatians 2:21 says, "if righteousness is through law, then Christ died for nothing."

Second, grace means God gets the glory. Ephesians 2:9 says it is not from works "so that no one may boast." Nobody in heaven will strut around saying, "I made it because I was better than the next guy." Every person there will say, "I'm here because of Jesus."

Third, grace makes salvation sure. Romans 4:16 says it is by faith "so that it may be according to grace, for the promise to be sure." If my salvation depended on my performance, I could never be sure I'd done enough. Because it rests on what Christ has done, it is as secure as His finished work.

Fourth, grace puts everyone on the same level. The respected church elder and the convict on death row come to God the same way: as sinners with empty hands. That is humbling for the proud and full of hope for the broken.

Two Men at the Temple

Jesus told a story that shows the difference between trying to earn God's favor and receiving His grace.

> *Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, having stood, was praying these things to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like the rest of men, swindlers, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice in the week; I tithe all things, as many as I acquire.' And the tax collector, having stood far off, was not willing to lift up even **his** eyes to heaven, but was striking his breast, saying, 'God, be propitious to me, the sinner!'* (Luke 18:10-13)

The Pharisee was a religious man. Pharisees were a group of Jewish teachers known for strict obedience to the law and the traditions added to it. This man fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of everything. By

outward standards, he was the best man in the temple. But listen to his prayer. It's all about him. He doesn't ask God for anything, because he doesn't think he needs anything.

The tax collector was the opposite. Tax collectors worked for Rome and were known for cheating their own people. He stood far off, wouldn't even look up, beat his chest, and asked for mercy. The word translated "be propitious" is related to the word propitiation we saw in Chapter 4. He was asking God to deal with his sin through a sacrifice and turn away His wrath.

Then Jesus gave the verdict. "This one went down to his house justified rather than that one" (Luke 18:14). The religious man went home lost. The sinner who knew he had nothing to offer went home right with God.

The Thief on the Cross

If you want to see grace with no works added, look at the man who hung next to Jesus.

> *And he was saying to Jesus, "Remember me, Lord, when You come in Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:42-43)

That man was a criminal who admitted he deserved to die (Luke 23:41). He was never baptized. He never joined a church, gave an offering, or did a single good deed after he believed. He couldn't. His hands and feet were nailed to a cross. All he could do was turn to Jesus and ask. And Jesus promised him paradise that very day.

I'm not saying baptism, church, and good works don't matter. They matter a great deal, and Part Three is all about them. But the thief shows us that they are not what saves. Christ saves, by grace, through faith.

Grace Is Not Cheap

Some people hear all this and think, "Great. If I'm saved by grace, I can live however I want." Paul heard that objection in his day, and he answered it with a strong "May it not be!" (Romans 6:1-2).

Grace is free, but it is not cheap. It cost God His Son. And grace doesn't just forgive us and leave us where we were. It changes us. Look at what Paul wrote to Titus.

> *For the grace of God has appeared, which brings salvation to all men, training us that, having denied ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present age* (Titus 2:11-12)

The same grace that saves us also trains us to say no to sin and yes to godly living. Ephesians 2:10 comes right after the "not from works" verses and says we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. Keep that sentence in mind. It is the hinge this whole book turns on.

Coming With Empty Hands

There is a line in the old hymn "Rock of Ages," written by Augustus Toplady in the 1700s: "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." That is how every person comes to God. Not with a record of accomplishments, not with a list of good deeds, not with a promise to try harder. Just with empty hands.

For some people, that is the hardest part. We are proud. We want to contribute something. It feels wrong to receive what we didn't earn. But the gift is only received by people who admit they can't pay for it.

For others, it's the best news they've ever heard. Maybe you think you've done too much wrong for God to accept you. Paul called himself the foremost of sinners, because he had hunted down Christians and dragged them to prison (1 Timothy 1:15; Acts 8:3). If God's grace could reach Paul, it can reach you. Romans 5:20 says, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Your sin is not bigger than God's grace.

So how does a person receive this gift? Ephesians 2:8 says we are saved by grace "through faith." Faith is the empty hand that receives the gift. That is where we turn next.

Study Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, how would you have explained how a person gets to heaven? Has your answer changed?
2. Put the difference between justice, mercy, and grace into your own words.
3. Read Ephesians 2:1-9. What were we before God saved us, and what did God do?
4. Why can't grace and works be mixed as the way to be saved (Romans 4:4-5; 11:6)?
5. In Luke 18:9-14, what was the Pharisee trusting in? What was the tax collector trusting in?
6. What does the thief on the cross teach us about how a person is saved (Luke 23:39-43)?
7. Some people think grace means we can live however we want. How does Titus 2:11-12 answer that?
8. Which is harder for you: believing you need grace, or believing God's grace is big enough for you? Why?

Take the Next Step

Write out Ephesians 2:8-9 on a card and put it where you will see it every day this week. Each time you read it, thank God for one thing He has given you that you did not earn.

Chapter 6: What Must I Do to Be Saved?

> *And having brought them outside, he said, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*
>
> Acts 16:30-31 (SLB)

There is a night in the book of Acts that I love. Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrown into the inner cell of a prison in the city of Philippi, their feet locked in stocks. At midnight, instead of complaining, they were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly an earthquake shook the prison, every door flew open, and everyone's chains came loose (Acts 16:22-26).

The jailer woke up, saw the open doors, and drew his sword to kill himself. Under Roman law, a guard who lost his prisoners could pay with his own life. Paul shouted, "Do no harm to yourself, for we are all here!" The jailer called for lights, ran in trembling, fell down before Paul and Silas, and asked the most important question a person can ask: "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" (Acts 16:27-30).

Their answer was short enough to fit on a business card. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

Everything we've covered so far comes down to this chapter. God made us. Sin separated us. God promised a Savior and sent Him. Jesus died for our sins and rose again. Salvation is a gift of grace. Now, how do you receive it?

God Is the One Who Draws You

Before we talk about what you do, it's worth saying that if you are reading this chapter and something inside you is stirring, that didn't start with you. Jesus said, "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). God is the One who opens blind eyes and softens hard hearts. He has been pursuing you longer than you have been seeking Him.

And here's the promise that goes with it. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). No one who comes to Jesus honestly has ever been turned away. Not one.

Repent: Turning Around

When the crowd on the day of Pentecost was cut to the heart and asked, "What shall we do?", Peter's first word was "Repent" (Acts 2:37-38). When Jesus began His ministry, His message was "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paul summed up his whole ministry as "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

The Greek word for repent, metanoeo, means to change your mind. But it is not a small change of opinion, like deciding you prefer coffee to tea. It is a change of mind about God, about sin, and about yourself that turns your whole life in a new direction. In the Old Testament, the common word for it means to turn or

return. Picture a man driving down the highway who realizes he's headed the wrong way. Repentance is when he admits it, takes the next exit, and turns around.

Repentance means you agree with God that your sin is sin. You stop making excuses and stop blaming others. You stop trusting in your own goodness to save you. And you turn toward God, willing for Him to change you. Paul described the believers in Thessalonica as those who "turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). They turned from something to Someone.

Let me clear up two things about repentance.

First, repentance is not cleaning yourself up before you come to God. You don't have to fix your life first. You couldn't if you tried. Repentance is coming to God as you are and saying, "I'm done running. I want You to change me." The prodigal son in Luke 15 didn't stop in town to buy new clothes before going home. He came home in his rags, and his father ran to meet him.

Second, repentance is not just feeling bad. People can feel terrible about being caught without ever turning from their sin. Paul says, "the grief according to God produces repentance to salvation," but "the grief of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Judas felt awful after he betrayed Jesus, but he never turned to God (Matthew 27:3-5). Peter also failed badly, denying Jesus three times, but he wept bitterly and came back (Luke 22:61-62; John 21:15-17). The difference was not how bad they felt. It was where they went with it.

Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. You can't turn toward Christ without turning away from sin, and you can't truly turn away from sin without turning toward Christ. When the Bible says "believe" alone, repentance is included. When it says "repent" alone, faith is included.

Believe: Trusting Jesus Christ

The most famous verse in the Bible tells us how to receive eternal life.

> *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)

Notice the word "everyone." No one is too far gone. And notice what everyone must do: believe in Him. But what does it mean to believe?

In the Bible, saving faith has three parts. It starts with knowing the facts of the gospel: that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for our sins, and that He rose from the dead. You can't trust someone you know nothing about. That's why Romans 10:17 says faith comes from hearing the word of God.

Second, saving faith agrees that those facts are true. But that alone is not enough. James says, "Even the demons believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). The demons know exactly who Jesus is. They believe the facts, and they are not saved.

Third, and most important, saving faith is trust. It means putting your full weight on Jesus to save you. The New Testament often says we believe "on" Him or "in" Him, not just believe about Him. It's the difference between believing a chair will hold you and actually sitting down in it.

Here's a picture that has helped many people. Imagine a tightrope walker who stretches a wire across a deep canyon. He walks across and back, then pushes a wheelbarrow across and back. The crowd cheers. He asks, "Do you believe I can push a man across in this wheelbarrow?" Everyone shouts yes. Then he says, "Good. Who wants to get in?" Saving faith is getting in the wheelbarrow. It is trusting Jesus with your life and your eternity, and nothing and no one else.

You might ask, "How much faith do I need?" Not much. Jesus said faith as small as "a grain of mustard" can move mountains (Matthew 17:20). It's not the size of your faith that saves you. It's the size of the One you trust. Weak faith in a strong Savior saves. Strong faith in a weak savior, like your own goodness, never will.

Confess and Call on the Lord

Paul gives a simple summary of how a person responds to the gospel in Romans 10.

> *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 "Lord Jesus" means to say out loud that Jesus is Lord, that He is God and that He is your Master. In the first century, saying "Jesus is Lord" could get you killed, because Rome demanded that people say "Caesar is Lord." This confession is not a magic formula. It is the heart's faith coming out of the mouth.

To believe "in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead" means trusting that Jesus is alive, that His death was accepted, and that He is a living Savior, not a dead teacher.

Then Paul adds the promise in verse 13.

> *For "everyone who calls on the name of **the** Lord will be saved."* (Romans 10:13)

To call on the name of the Lord is to cry out to Him for salvation. It is what the tax collector did in Luke 18 when he prayed, "God, be propitious to me, the sinner!" It is what the thief on the cross did when he said, "Remember me, Lord." It is a sinner's honest appeal to the only One who can save.

Receive Him as Lord and Savior

John 1:12 puts it this way.

> *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)

Salvation is not just believing true things about Jesus. It is receiving Jesus Himself. He is a Person, not a philosophy. When you receive Him, you receive Him as both Savior and Lord. You can't take half of Jesus. You can't say, "I'll take the forgiveness, but I'll keep running my own life." You come to Him as your Savior, the One who rescues you from sin, and as your Lord, the One you now follow.

That doesn't mean you have to be perfect from the first day. No new believer understands everything that will mean. It means your heart says yes to Him, and you are willing for Him to lead. Over the rest of your life, He will show you what that looks like, one step at a time.

What About Baptism, Church, and Good Works?

You might be wondering where baptism, church membership, and good works fit in. Some churches teach that they are part of what saves you. I believe the Bible teaches that they follow salvation. They are the first steps of a saved person, not steps toward being saved.

Look at how the New Testament answers the question, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer, over and over, is to repent and believe in Jesus (John 3:16; John 5:24; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-13; Ephesians 2:8-9). The thief on the cross was saved without any of those other things. In Acts 10, Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit while Peter was still preaching, before they were baptized (Acts 10:43-48). God had already accepted them by faith, and their baptism followed.

Peter's words in Acts 2:38, "let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins," are an important verse, and I'll come back to it in Chapter 10 with a fair look at the other view. For now, here's the simple truth. Baptism matters a great deal. Every believer should be baptized, and in the New Testament they were baptized right away. But the water does not save. Christ saves, and faith receives Him.

Is a Prayer Required?

Many people come to Christ by praying a prayer like the one below. That is a good and biblical thing to do, because we are told to call on the name of the Lord. But I want to be clear: words alone don't save anyone. It's not the prayer that saves you. It is Jesus who saves you, when you put your trust in Him. A prayer is simply a way of telling God what is happening in your heart.

Some people pray a prayer like this after reading the Bible alone in their room. Others pray it with a friend, a pastor, or at the front of a church. Others trust Christ without praying any particular words at all. The place and the words don't matter. What matters is that you turn from your sin and trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Your Response

Maybe you have read this far and you know you have never truly trusted Christ. You've known about Him, maybe for years, but you've never turned to Him and received Him. Or maybe you're not sure. Second Corinthians 6:2 says, "now is a day of salvation." Don't put it off.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and meant it, I want you to know what the Bible says just happened. Your sins are forgiven (Colossians 1:14). You have passed from death into life (John 5:24). You are a child of God (John 1:12). And Jesus said there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). Heaven is celebrating you right now.

Write down today's date somewhere you'll keep it, like the inside cover of this book or your Bible. Then tell another believer what you've done. Ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve as part of the body of Christ. The rest of this book will walk you through what happens next.

Study Questions

1. Read Acts 16:25-34. What did the jailer ask, and how did Paul and Silas answer? What happened afterward?
2. Put repentance into your own words. What is the difference between being sorry you got caught and true repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10)?
3. Why don't we have to clean up our lives before coming to God? How does the story of the prodigal son show this (Luke 15:11-24)?
4. What is the difference between believing facts about Jesus and trusting Him (James 2:19; John 1:12)?
5. Read Romans 10:9-13. What does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord and to call on His name?
6. Why can't we receive Jesus as Savior but refuse Him as Lord?
7. If baptism and good works don't save us, why do you think God still commands them?
8. Have you turned from your sin and trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If so, when? If not, what is holding you back?

Take the Next Step

If you trusted Christ while reading this chapter, tell someone this week: a Christian friend, a family member, or a pastor. If you came to faith earlier in your life, write down the story of how it happened in a few paragraphs. You'll use it again in Chapter 14.

Chapter 7: Born Again: What God Does When You Believe

> *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 (SLB)

When a person trusts Christ, it may feel like a quiet moment. Maybe you were alone in your room. Maybe you were sitting in a pew, or in your truck in a parking lot. You may have felt a flood of emotion, or you may have felt nothing much at all. Either way, the Bible says more happened in that moment than you could ever see.

In this chapter, we'll look at what God does for a person and in a person the moment they believe. Some of these truths come with big theological words. Don't let that scare you. I'll explain each one, and I think you'll find they are some of the most encouraging words in the Bible.

Since May 2020, the present tense of salvation is the one I lean on most. The past settled my guilt at the cross. The future guarantees heaven. The present is Christ freeing me from the power of sin right now (Romans 6:14). Knowing God is changing us today gives strength for this week's battles.

Born From Above

One night a man named Nicodemus came to see Jesus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. If anyone could have earned his way into God's kingdom, it was Nicodemus. Jesus told him something that stopped him cold.

> *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)

The Greek word translated "from above" can also mean "again," which is why many people use the phrase "born again." Both ideas are true. It is a second birth, and it comes from above, from God.

Nicodemus didn't understand. He asked how a grown man could enter his mother's womb a second time (John 3:4). Jesus explained that He wasn't talking about a physical birth. "That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

Think about your first birth. You didn't do anything to make it happen. You didn't plan it, earn it, or decide on it. It happened to you. The new birth is the same. The Bible calls it regeneration, which means being given new life (Titus 3:5). It is God's work, done by the Holy Spirit, the moment a person trusts Christ. Before, you were "dead in the trespasses" (Ephesians 2:1). Now God has made you alive (Ephesians 2:5).

A New Creation

Read the verse at the top of this chapter again. If anyone is in Christ, he is "a new creation." Not a better version of the old one. Not a cleaned-up sinner. A new creation.

God promised this through the prophet Ezekiel hundreds of years before Christ.

> *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And My Spirit I will put within you, and I will bring about that you walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do **them**.* (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

That is what happens when you are born again. God gives you a new heart with new desires. Things you used to love, you may start to hate. Things you used to ignore, like God's Word, prayer, and His people, you start to want. You will still struggle with sin, and we'll talk about that in Chapter 13. But something has changed at the root, and you will never be the same.

This is why the change in a believer's life is not the cause of salvation, but the evidence of it. An apple tree doesn't become an apple tree by growing apples. It grows apples because it is an apple tree. A Christian doesn't become a Christian by doing good. He does good because God has made him new.

Forgiven

When you trusted Christ, every one of your sins was forgiven. Not just the ones you remembered to confess. All of them.

> *And you, being dead in the trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all the trespasses, having blotted out the handwriting against us in the decrees, which was opposed to us; and He has taken it out of the midst, having nailed it to the cross* (Colossians 2:13-14)

In the ancient world, the "handwriting against us" was like a written record of debt, an IOU. Paul says God took the list of everything we owed, every sin and every failure, and nailed it to the cross. Jesus paid it in full.

How far away are your sins once they are forgiven? "As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us" (Psalm 103:12). If you travel north, eventually you start going south. But you can travel east forever and never start going west. God says that is how far He has removed your sin.

Some people say, "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself." I understand that feeling, but think about what it means. If the holy God of the universe, the One you sinned against, has forgiven you, who are you to hold onto it? God says He will "certainly not remember" their sins and lawless deeds "any more" (Hebrews 8:12). That doesn't mean God forgets like we do. It means He chooses never to hold them against you again. When old guilt comes back, take it to the cross and leave it there.

Justified: Declared Righteous

Forgiveness takes away our sin. But God does even more than that. He also declares us righteous.

> *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1)

Justification is a courtroom word. It means God, the Judge, declares a person not guilty and fully righteous in His sight. It doesn't mean God pretends we never sinned. It means our sin was paid for by Jesus, and His perfect righteousness is credited to our account. Remember 2 Corinthians 5:21 from Chapter 4: He was made sin for us, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

A simple way some people remember it is that justified means "just as if I'd never sinned." That's a helpful start, but it's actually better than that. It means "just as if I'd always obeyed," because Christ's perfect obedience now counts for me.

That is why Paul could write, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). No condemnation. Not less condemnation, not a lighter sentence. None. The verdict has been read, and it can't be reversed. And notice that the result is "peace with God." The war is over. You are no longer God's enemy (Romans 5:10).

Adopted Into God's Family

God doesn't just pardon criminals and send them on their way. He brings them home and makes them His children.

> *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received* ***the*** *Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God* (Romans 8:15-16)

In the Roman world, adoption was a legal act that gave a person a new father, a new name, and full rights as an heir. An adopted son could not be disowned. Paul says that is what God has done for us. "Abba" is an Aramaic word a child used for his father, something like "Dad" or "Papa." The Creator of the universe invites you to call Him that.

First John 3:1 says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God!" Maybe you grew up without a father, or with a father who hurt you. God is the Father you always needed. He will never leave you, never abuse you, and never stop loving you.

And if you are God's child, you are also His heir (Romans 8:17). Everything the Father has promised His Son, He shares with His children.

The Holy Spirit Lives in You

The moment you trusted Christ, God gave you His Holy Spirit to live inside you. Paul told the Ephesians that "having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). In the ancient world, a seal was a mark of ownership and protection. A king's seal on a letter meant it belonged to him and no one had the right to break it.

The Holy Spirit is also called a "pledge of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14). A pledge is like a down payment or an engagement ring. It is a guarantee that the rest is coming.

Every believer has the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 says, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not His." You don't have to wait for some second experience to receive Him. He came to live in you the day you believed. He is the One who helps you understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:12), helps you pray (Romans 8:26), gives you power to say no to sin (Galatians 5:16), and produces the fruit of a changed life (Galatians 5:22-23).

Paul also says something sobering about this. Because the Spirit lives in you, your body is His temple. "You are not your own," because "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We'll come back to what that means for how we live in Part Three.

Brought Into the Body of Christ

When you trusted Christ, you were also joined to every other believer. First Corinthians 12:13 says that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." This is not water baptism, which we'll talk about in Chapter 10. It is the Holy Spirit's work of placing you into the body of Christ, the church.

You are no longer a stranger or an outsider. Paul says you are "fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). You have brothers and sisters all over the world and throughout history. We'll talk about what that means for your life in Chapter 11.

Past, Present, and Future

Here is a simple way to keep it all straight. The Bible talks about salvation in three tenses.

- **I have been saved** from the penalty of sin. This is justification. It happened the moment I believed, and it is finished (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 5:1).
- **I am being saved** from the power of sin. This is sanctification, which means being made holy. It is the lifelong work of the Holy Spirit making me more like Jesus (Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
- **I will be saved** from the presence of sin. This is glorification. One day, when Jesus comes for His church, I will be made completely like Him, body and soul, and sin will be gone forever (Romans 8:30; 1 John 3:2).

That helps explain why a new believer can be completely forgiven and accepted by God, and still have a lot of growing to do. The verdict is in. The growing has begun. And the finish line is guaranteed. Paul wrote, "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

You might be asking, "If all of that is true, can I be sure it's true of me? And can I ever lose it?" Those are good questions, and they're the subject of the next chapter.

Study Questions

1. Read John 3:1-8. Why do you think Jesus told a respected religious leader like Nicodemus that he needed to be born again?
2. In what ways is the new birth like our physical birth?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ezekiel 36:26-27. What changes has God made, or begun to make, in your desires since you trusted Christ?
4. What does Colossians 2:13-14 say God did with the record of your sins? How does that make you feel?

5. Explain the difference between being forgiven and being justified.
6. What does it mean to you to call God “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15)? Is that easy or hard for you, and why?
7. List some of the things the Holy Spirit does in a believer’s life, using the verses in this chapter.
8. Which of the three tenses of salvation (past, present, future) do you most need to remember this week, and why?

Take the Next Step

Read Romans 8 slowly this week, a few verses each day. Every time you see a promise God makes to those who are in Christ, underline it or write it down. At the end of the week, pick the one that means the most to you and memorize it.

Chapter 8: Can I Know I Am Saved?

> *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 (SLB)

Picture a woman named Linda. She trusted Christ at a youth camp when she was fifteen. She meant it with all her heart. But now she is forty-two, and some days she wonders if it was real. She has had seasons when she walked closely with God and seasons when she drifted. When she hears a sermon about sin, she feels a knot in her stomach. She lies awake some nights asking, "If I died tonight, would I go to heaven?"

Linda is not unusual. Many sincere believers struggle with doubt about their salvation. And on the other side, there are people who feel completely sure they are going to heaven because they prayed a prayer once or grew up in church, but whose lives show no sign that they know Christ at all.

The Bible speaks to both. In this chapter, we'll look at how you can know you are saved, what the Bible says about the tests of real faith, and a question Christians have discussed for centuries: can a saved person ever lose their salvation?

God Wants You to Know

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. John wrote his first letter "so that you may know that you have eternal life." Not hope. Not guess. Know.

God doesn't want His children living in constant fear about whether they belong to Him. Think about how a good father would feel if his son came to him every night asking, "Am I still your son? Will you still be my dad tomorrow?" It would break his heart. Our heavenly Father wants us to rest in His love.

Assurance of salvation means the settled confidence that you belong to God and have eternal life. The Bible gives us three solid places to stand.

First: The Promises of God

The first and most important ground of assurance is not your feelings or even your behavior. It is what God has said.

> *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.*
> (1 John 5:11-12)

That is very simple. Eternal life is in Jesus. If you have the Son, you have life. Not "might have" or "will have if you're good enough." Has. Jesus said the same thing.

> *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)

Notice the tenses. The one who believes "has eternal life." He "does not come into judgment." He "has passed out of death into life." It's already done.

Feelings come and go. You might feel close to God on Sunday and far away on Tuesday after a bad night's sleep and a fight with your spouse. If your assurance rests on your feelings, it will rise and fall like the stock market. But God's promises don't change with your mood. When you doubt, go back to what He has said. Ask yourself, "Have I turned from my sin and put my trust in Jesus Christ?" If the answer is yes, then God's promise is for you.

Second: The Witness of the Spirit

The second ground of assurance is the Holy Spirit's inner work. Paul says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). John says, "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

This is hard to describe, but believers know what it is. It is a quiet, growing sense that God is your Father. It shows up when you find yourself praying to Him like a child talks to a dad. It shows up when you read Scripture and it comes alive. It shows up when you feel grief over a sin you used to enjoy. Those things don't come naturally to a person who doesn't know God. They are signs that the Spirit is living in you.

Third: The Evidence of a Changed Life

The third ground of assurance is the fruit of a changed life. John's whole first letter is full of these tests. Here are a few.

- Do you want to obey God? "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3).
- Do you love other believers? "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers" (1 John 3:14).
- Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? (1 John 5:1, 5).
- Is sin a burden to you, rather than a lifestyle you are comfortable in? "Everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin" (1 John 3:9).

Let me be careful here, because these tests can be misused. They don't mean that a real Christian never sins. In the same letter, John says, "If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8), and he tells us that "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). The word "practice" in 1 John 3:9 means an ongoing pattern, a settled way of life. A believer still sins, but he can't sin comfortably anymore. He fights it, confesses it, and gets back up.

These tests also don't mean you have to measure up to some level of perfection to be sure. They're not a scorecard. They're more like checking for a pulse. A newborn baby doesn't do much, but you can tell he's alive. In the same way, a new believer may have a long way to go, but there will be signs of life.

Paul tells us to examine ourselves: "Test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). That is healthy. But don't spend all your time staring at yourself. Look mostly at Jesus. The more you look at Him, the more your assurance will grow.

A Sobering Warning

Not everyone who claims to be a Christian really is. Jesus said this at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

> *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one who does the will of My Father who **is** in **the** heavens. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.'* (Matthew 7:21-23)

Those are some of the most frightening words in the Bible. These people called Jesus "Lord." They did religious things in His name, even impressive ones. But Jesus never knew them. They had a religion, but they didn't have a relationship with Him.

Jesus also told a parable about seed falling on different kinds of soil. Some fell on rocky ground, sprang up quickly, and then withered when the sun came out because it had no root (Matthew 13:20-21). That describes people who respond to the gospel with excitement but whose faith was never real, and when hard times come, they fall away.

So if you have no desire for God, no interest in His Word, no love for His people, and no grief over sin, and you're resting on a prayer you prayed years ago, please don't ignore that. Go back to Chapter 6. Settle it with God today. I'm not saying this to scare you. I'm saying it because I'd rather you be uncomfortable now than surprised on that day.

Can a Saved Person Lose Salvation?

This is a question sincere, Bible-believing Christians have disagreed on for a long time. I want to lay out the two main views fairly. Both sides love Jesus, believe in salvation by grace through faith, and take the Bible seriously.

The first view is often called eternal security, or "once saved, always saved." It teaches that a person who is truly born again can never lose their salvation, because God keeps those He saves. Those who hold this view point to verses like these.

> *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)

They also point to Romans 8:38-39, which says nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. They note that Philippians 1:6 promises God will complete the work He began, that believers are "guarded by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5), and that the Holy Spirit is the seal and pledge of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). They argue that if salvation is a gift we didn't earn by our works, we

can't lose it by our works either. When someone falls away completely, they understand it the way John does in 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." In other words, a person who walks away for good shows that they were never truly saved.

The second view teaches that a true believer can fall away and lose salvation. Those who hold this view agree that no one can snatch us out of Christ's hand, but they believe a person can choose to walk away from Christ by turning away from faith. They point to the warning passages, such as Hebrews 6:4-6, which speaks of people who "were once enlightened" and became "partakers of the Holy Spirit" and then "have fallen away." They also point to Hebrews 3:14, which says we have become partakers of Christ "if indeed we hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm until the end," and Colossians 1:22-23, which says Christ will present us holy "if indeed you continue in the faith." They note that Jesus' promise in John 10 is to sheep who "follow Me," and they argue the warnings would be empty if there were no real danger.

Those who hold to eternal security answer that the warning passages either describe people who were close to the gospel but never truly born again, or that they are one of the means God uses to keep His people going. Those on the other side answer that the promises are real, but they are promises to those who keep believing.

Here is what both sides agree on, and it matters a great deal. First, real saving faith keeps going. Whether you explain it as God keeping the believer or the believer continuing in faith, everyone agrees that a person who is truly trusting Christ today is saved today and has nothing to fear from God's judgment. Second, no sin you confess and turn from is too big for God's grace (1 John 1:9). A believer who stumbles is not kicked out of the family. God disciplines His children because He loves them (Hebrews 12:6). Third, a person who claims to know Christ but lives in open, unrepentant rebellion against Him for years has no reason to feel secure. And fourth, the way to have peace about this is not to argue about it, but to keep trusting and following Jesus today.

In my Romans and Ephesians studies, I left this question open with both views stated, and I'll do the same here. Study the passages yourself, talk with your pastor, and be gracious to Christians who land on the other side. What you can be sure of is this: anyone who comes to Jesus, He "will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

When Doubts Come

Almost every Christian goes through seasons of doubt. Sometimes doubts come because of sin we haven't dealt with. Sometimes they come from a hard trial, a loss, or depression. Sometimes they are simply attacks from the enemy, who loves to make God's children feel like orphans. Here are some simple steps when you find yourself doubting.

1. Go back to the promises. Read John 3:16, John 5:24, John 10:27-29, and 1 John 5:11-13 out loud. God's Word is more reliable than your feelings.
2. Look back to the cross. Your salvation doesn't rest on how strong your faith feels today but on what Jesus did. "It has been finished" (John 19:30).

3. Deal honestly with sin. If there is sin you're holding onto, confess it and turn from it. God promises to forgive and cleanse (1 John 1:9).
4. Talk to a mature believer or your pastor. Don't fight doubts alone. Other Christians have walked this road and can help.
5. If you're truly unsure whether you ever trusted Christ, settle it now. You don't need to keep wondering. Turn to Him today and trust Him. He promised not to turn you away.

Remember Peter. On the night Jesus was arrested, Jesus told him, "Satan has asked for you, to sift you like wheat. But I begged for you, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31-32). Peter denied Jesus three times that very night. But Jesus' prayer held. Peter came back, and Jesus restored him and gave him work to do. If you belong to Jesus, He is praying for you too (Hebrews 7:25).

Study Questions

1. Read 1 John 5:11-13. Why do you think God wants His children to know they have eternal life?
2. What is the difference between basing your assurance on God's promises and basing it on your feelings?
3. Read John 5:24. What three things does Jesus say about the one who believes?
4. Look at the tests in 1 John 2:3, 3:9, and 3:14. Why are these tests "checking for a pulse" rather than a scorecard?
5. Read Matthew 7:21-23. What did these people have, and what were they missing?
6. In your own words, summarize the two main views on whether a believer can lose salvation. What do both views agree on?
7. What usually causes doubt in your life? Which of the steps in "When Doubts Come" would help you most?
8. Read Luke 22:31-34 and John 21:15-17. What does Peter's story teach you about Jesus' faithfulness to His people?

Take the Next Step

Write 1 John 5:11-13 on a card and memorize it this week. The next time a doubt comes, say it out loud and thank God that your salvation rests on His promise, not your feelings.

Part Three: Living Out God’s Plan

Chapter 9: Saved for Good Works

> *For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.*
>
> Ephesians 2:10 (SLB)

We have come to the turning point of this book. Part One showed God's plan. Part Two showed the road to salvation. Now Part Three turns to the life that follows.

Before we look at baptism, the church, prayer, the Bible, and the rest, I want to settle one question clearly, because if you get this one wrong, everything else in Part Three will be wrong too. Why does a saved person do good works at all?

The Verse After the Verse

Many Christians know Ephesians 2:8-9 by heart. "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." But not as many know the very next verse, the one at the top of this chapter.

Paul says we are God's "workmanship." The Greek word is poiema, which gives us our English word poem. It means something carefully made, a masterpiece. You are God's handiwork. And He made you new in Christ "for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them."

Think about that. Before you were born, before you trusted Christ, God already had good works planned for your life. He has a path laid out, and He saved you so that you would walk in it. That is God's plan for your life.

Put verses 8, 9, and 10 together, and you have the whole picture. We are not saved by good works (verses 8-9). We are saved for good works (verse 10). Works are not the root of salvation. They are the fruit.

Root and Fruit

Jesus used this same picture.

> *So every good tree produces good fruits, but the rotten tree produces evil fruits. A good tree is not able to produce evil fruits, nor a rotten tree to produce good fruits.* (Matthew 7:17-18)

A tree doesn't produce fruit in order to become a tree. It produces fruit because of what it already is. An apple tree grows apples. A grapevine grows grapes. If you see a tree loaded with oranges, you know what kind of tree it is.

In Chapter 7, we saw that God makes us new creations when we believe. He gives us a new heart and puts His Spirit inside us. Good works are what grow naturally out of that new life. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one remaining in Me and I in him, this one bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5).

That takes a lot of pressure off. You don't have to work up good works by sheer willpower to prove yourself to God. Your job is to stay close to Jesus, like a branch staying connected to the vine. He produces the fruit.

Doesn't James Disagree With Paul?

Some people read James 2 and think it contradicts everything we covered in Part Two. Here is part of what James wrote.

> *What **is** the profit, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Surely the faith is not able to save him?* (James 2:14)

> *For just as the body apart from **the** spirit is dead, so also the faith apart from the works is dead.* (James 2:26)

James even says, "You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Paul says we are justified by faith apart from works (Romans 3:28). So which is it?

When you read both men carefully, they are not fighting each other. They are fighting two different enemies.

Paul is fighting people who think they can earn salvation by keeping the law. He says no one is made right with God that way. We are justified before God by faith alone.

James is fighting people who think they can claim to have faith while living however they want. Look at his question again: "if someone says he has faith." James is talking about someone who claims faith but shows no evidence of it. He says that kind of "faith" is dead. It isn't real faith at all. It's like a body with no breath in it.

James's illustration makes it plain. If a brother or sister is hungry and cold, and you say, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," but don't give them anything, what good is that (James 2:15-16)? Words without action are empty. So is faith without works.

Both James and Paul use Abraham as their example (Romans 4:1-3; James 2:21-23). Paul points to Genesis 15, where Abraham believed God and was counted righteous. James points to Genesis 22, many years later, where Abraham offered Isaac. Abraham was declared righteous by faith in Genesis 15, and his obedience in Genesis 22 proved his faith was real.

Here's a way to put it that I find helpful. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. Real faith always goes to work.

Why We Do Good Works

If good works don't save us, why do them? The Bible gives several reasons, and every one of them is better than trying to earn God's favor.

Because we love Him. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Obedience is how love shows itself. A husband doesn't bring his wife flowers to earn the right to stay married. He does

it because he loves her. In the same way, we obey Jesus not to get Him to love us, but because He already does.

Because of what He did for us. Paul wrote, "the love of Christ compels us." Since Jesus died for us, "those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to the One who died for them and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). When you understand how much you were forgiven, you want to live for the One who forgave you.

Because it brings God glory. Jesus said, "Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in the heavens" (Matthew 5:16). When people see a changed life, they see what God can do.

Because it is God's plan for your life. That's the point of Ephesians 2:10. God has prepared good works for you. You will never be more fulfilled than when you are walking in the path He made for you.

Because it shows that our faith is real. This is James's point. Good works don't make us Christians, but they give evidence to us and to others that we are (2 Peter 1:5-10).

Because there are rewards. The Bible says believers will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not to see whether they are saved, but to receive rewards for how they lived (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). We'll look at that in Chapter 14.

A Living Sacrifice

After Paul spends eleven chapters in Romans explaining salvation by grace, he turns the corner in chapter 12 with one word: "Therefore."

> *Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies **as** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God **is**, the good and well-pleasing and perfect **will**.* (Romans 12:1-2)

Notice the order. Paul doesn't say, "Do these things so that God will have compassion on you." He says, "through the compassions of God," because of everything God has already done, give yourself back to Him. An Old Testament sacrifice was killed and placed on the altar. Paul says we are to be living sacrifices, giving ourselves to God every day while we're alive.

He also says this is how we discover God's will: not by being shaped by the world around us, but by letting God change the way we think. The more your mind is renewed by God's Word, the more you will "prove what the will of God is, the good and well-pleasing and perfect will." His plan for your life is good. It isn't something to fear.

Work It Out

Paul gives one more verse that keeps the balance just right.

> *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the **One***

> *who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of **His** good pleasure.*
> (Philippians 2:12-13)

Paul doesn't say "work for your salvation." He says work it out. You can't work out something you don't already have. When you work out at a gym, you're exercising muscles you already have so they get stronger. In the same way, God has put salvation in you, and now you live it out in every part of your life.

And notice the second half. "God is the One who is working in you." You work, and God works in you. It's not either-or. You make real choices and put in real effort, but behind your effort is God's power, giving you both the desire and the ability to do what pleases Him.

What God's Plan Looks Like

So what are these good works God has prepared? Some are unique to you, like the people He puts in your path, the gifts He has given you, and the work He calls you to. But many are the same for every believer. The New Testament shows us a clear pattern of what a Christian life looks like. Here's what the rest of this book covers.

- **Baptism**, your first public step of obedience (Chapter 10).
- **The church**, where you belong, worship, take the Lord's Supper, and give (Chapter 11).
- **Prayer and God's Word**, the way you grow in your relationship with God (Chapter 12).
- **Walking in the Spirit and serving others**, how you grow in holiness, fight sin, and use your gifts (Chapter 13).
- **Telling others and living for eternity**, sharing the good news and keeping your eyes on Christ's return (Chapter 14).

None of these things will make God love you more than He already does. All of them are part of His plan for your life. And every one of them is a way of saying thank you to the God who saved you.

Study Questions

1. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. In your own words, how do verses 8-9 and verse 10 fit together?
2. What does it mean to you that you are God's "workmanship," and that He prepared good works for you ahead of time?
3. Explain the root and fruit picture. Why is it dangerous to get the order backwards?
4. Read James 2:14-26. What kind of "faith" is James warning about?
5. How would you explain to a friend that Paul and James don't contradict each other?
6. Of the reasons for doing good works listed in this chapter, which one motivates you most? Which one do you think about least?
7. Read Romans 12:1-2. What would it look like for you to be a living sacrifice this week?
8. What is the difference between working for your salvation and working it out (Philippians 2:12-13)?

Take the Next Step

Ask God each morning this week, “What good work have You prepared for me today?” Then watch for it. It may be as simple as encouraging a coworker, helping a neighbor, or being patient with your kids. At the end of the week, write down what He showed you.

Chapter 10: Baptism: Your First Step of Obedience

> *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*
>
> Matthew 28:19 (SLB)

Picture a man named Marcus. He trusted Christ at forty-five after years of hard living. A few weeks later, his pastor asked if he wanted to be baptized. Marcus hesitated. “I’m already saved,” he said. “Why do I need to get dunked in front of everybody?”

It’s a fair question, and many new believers ask it. Others come from churches that taught them baptism is what saves you, and now they’re confused about what it means. In this chapter, we’ll look at what the Bible says about baptism: what it is, what it isn’t, who should be baptized, and why it matters so much.

I was baptized on October 19, 1995, years after I first trusted Christ as a boy in Victorville. That same day I had the honor of baptizing my wife, and years later I baptized our youngest daughter in our backyard pool in Las Vegas. Baptism is the first step of obedience for anyone who has believed the gospel (Acts 2:41). If you have trusted Jesus, do not put off that public step.

Jesus Commands It

The simplest reason to be baptized is that Jesus told us to. After His resurrection, just before He returned to heaven, Jesus gave His followers their marching orders.

> *And Jesus, having come up, spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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 28:18-20)

Notice that baptism is part of making disciples. Jesus didn’t say, “Go make converts, and baptize them if they feel like it.” Baptism is the first step of following Him. It is the first thing Jesus commands a new believer to do.

Jesus also set the example. He was baptized by John in the Jordan River at the start of His ministry. He had no sin to repent of, and John tried to talk Him out of it. But Jesus said, “Permit it now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). If the sinless Son of God was willing to be baptized out of obedience to His Father, we have every reason to follow Him.

Believers Were Baptized Right Away

When you read the book of Acts, you notice a pattern. People heard the gospel, believed, and were baptized, usually right away.

- On the day of Pentecost, those who received Peter's message were baptized, about three thousand people (Acts 2:41).
- In Samaria, when people believed Philip's preaching, "they were being baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).
- The Ethiopian official heard the gospel on the road, saw water, and asked, "What hinders me from being baptized?" He was baptized on the spot (Acts 8:36-38).
- Saul (later called Paul) was baptized as soon as his sight returned, three days after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:18).
- Lydia and her household were baptized after the Lord opened her heart (Acts 16:14-15).
- The Philippian jailer, whose story opened Chapter 6, was baptized with his household "in that hour of the night" (Acts 16:33).

In the New Testament, there was no such thing as a believer who refused to be baptized, or who put it off for years. Baptism was how a person said publicly, "I belong to Jesus now." When Ananias came to Saul, he asked, "And now why do you delay?" (Acts 22:16). That is a good question for any believer who hasn't been baptized yet.

What Baptism Pictures

The clearest explanation of what baptism means is in Romans 6.

> *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)

Baptism is a picture of the gospel and of what happened to you when you trusted Christ. When a person goes down into the water, it pictures being buried with Christ. Your old life, the person you were without Him, died with Him on the cross. When you come up out of the water, it pictures being raised with Christ to a brand-new life.

It's a little like a wedding ring. A ring doesn't make you married. You are married when you make your vows. But the ring is a public sign of what has happened, and a married man who refuses to wear his ring is sending a strange message. Baptism doesn't make you a Christian. But it is the outward sign of what God has done inside you, and it tells the world whose you are.

Baptism also identifies you with the people of God. When you are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," you are saying that you belong to the triune God and to His family, the church. In the early church, baptism was often the moment when believers paid a price. In some parts of the world today, it still is. Being baptized can cost a person their family, their job, or even their life. It is a serious public statement.

Does Baptism Save?

Here is where Christians have disagreed. I believe the Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, and that baptism is the first step of obedience that follows saving faith. Baptism does

not save us. But it is a public picture of a real union with Christ that happens when we believe. I want to give you the reasons for that, and also be fair to those who see it differently.

Here are the main reasons I believe baptism follows salvation rather than causing it.

First, the New Testament over and over says we are saved by faith, with no mention of baptism (John 3:16; John 5:24; Acts 10:43; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9). If baptism were required to be saved, it's hard to explain why it would be left out of so many of these verses.

Second, Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48). Romans 8:9 says only those who belong to Christ have the Spirit. So they were already saved when they went into the water.

Third, the thief on the cross was promised paradise without being baptized (Luke 23:43).

Fourth, Paul said, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17), and he was thankful he had baptized only a few people in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). It's hard to picture him saying that if baptism were part of what saves.

Now, to be fair, some churches, including the Churches of Christ, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and others, teach that baptism is part of how God gives forgiveness. They point to verses like these.

- Acts 2:38, where Peter said, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins."
- Acts 22:16, where Ananias told Saul, "be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
- 1 Peter 3:21, which says baptism "now saves us."
- Mark 16:16, "The one having believed and having been baptized will be saved."

These are real verses, and we shouldn't brush them aside. Here is how I understand them.

In Acts 2:38, the Greek word translated "for" (eis) can mean "in order to" or "because of" or "with a view to." Some read it as "be baptized in order to receive forgiveness." Others read it as "be baptized because you have received forgiveness," or "in connection with" the forgiveness that comes through repentance and faith. Peter's very next sermon calls people to "Repent therefore and turn again, so that your sins may be blotted out" and does not mention baptism (Acts 3:19). And in Acts 10:43, Peter says that "everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." So I read Acts 2:38 as tying baptism closely to the repentance and faith that bring forgiveness, as the first act of a person who has turned to Christ.

In Acts 22:16, notice the last phrase: "calling on the name of the Lord." Romans 10:13 says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I believe calling on His name is what brings forgiveness, and baptism is the outward sign that pictures the washing God gives.

In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter immediately explains what he means. He says baptism saves "not a putting away of the filth of the flesh," meaning not the water washing the body, "but the pledge of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is not the water that saves, but the reality it pictures: a heart turned to God, joined to the risen Christ.

Mark 16:16 says the one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but notice what it says about the lost: "the one having disbelieved will be condemned." It doesn't say "the one who is not baptized." Unbelief is what condemns. (Mark 16:9-20 is also one of the passages that most of the oldest Greek copies of Mark do not include, though the Steadfast Literal Bible prints it because it follows the Received Greek Text. No teaching of the faith rests on it alone.)

So where does that leave us? Here is what every Bible-believing church agrees on: Jesus commands baptism, every believer should be baptized, and the New Testament never pictures a believer who refuses it. Whatever church you're in, if you have trusted Christ and haven't been baptized, don't delay.

Who Should Be Baptized?

In every example in the New Testament, the people who were baptized were people who had heard the gospel and believed it. Philip told the Ethiopian, "If you believe from all your heart, it is permitted" (Acts 8:37). (Like Mark 16:9-20, this verse is missing from many of the oldest Greek copies, and the SLB prints it from the Received Greek Text. Either way, every baptism in Acts follows faith.) For that reason, many churches baptize only those who are old enough to understand the gospel and confess faith in Christ for themselves. This is often called believer's baptism.

Other churches, including Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican churches, baptize the infants of believing parents. They see baptism as a sign of God's covenant, like circumcision in the Old Testament (Colossians 2:11-12). They point to the households that were baptized in Acts (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16), which may have included children.

I believe the pattern of the New Testament is that baptism follows a person's own faith in Christ. If you were baptized as a baby and have since trusted Christ for yourself, I'd encourage you to talk with your pastor and pray about being baptized as a believer. Many Christians have taken that step, not to reject their parents' love, but to make their own public confession of faith.

How Should a Person Be Baptized?

The Greek word baptizo means to dip, plunge, or immerse. That's why many churches baptize by putting a person completely under the water. Immersion fits the picture in Romans 6 and Colossians 2:12 of being buried and raised with Christ. When Jesus was baptized, He "went up from the water" (Matthew 3:16), and Philip and the Ethiopian "both went down into the water" (Acts 8:38).

Some churches baptize by pouring or sprinkling water. Good Christians disagree on this, and I don't think the mode of baptism is something to divide over. What matters most is that a person who has trusted Christ obeys Him by being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Taking the Step

If you have trusted Christ and have not been baptized, here's how to take the step.

1. Talk to a pastor at a Bible-teaching church. Tell him you have trusted Christ and want to be baptized. Most churches offer a short class or conversation first, so you understand what baptism means.

2. Be ready to share, in a few sentences, how you came to trust Christ. Many churches give new believers a chance to tell their story before they're baptized. Don't worry about saying it perfectly. Just tell the truth.
3. Invite your family and friends. Baptism is a public testimony. Some of the people who come to watch may hear the gospel for the first time.
4. Remember it. Write down the date. Your baptism is a marker you can look back on for the rest of your life.

Marcus did get baptized. He invited his brother, who hadn't set foot in a church in twenty years. His brother stood in the back, arms folded, and watched Marcus come up out of the water with a grin from ear to ear. Six months later, his brother was baptized in the same tank. That's one picture of what can happen when a believer takes the first step of obedience.

Study Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus made baptism part of His command to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)?
2. Read Matthew 3:13-17. Why was Jesus baptized, even though He had no sin?
3. Look at the examples of baptism in Acts. What pattern do you see in when and why people were baptized?
4. Read Romans 6:3-4. What does going under the water and coming back up picture?
5. How does the wedding ring picture help explain the difference between being saved and being baptized?
6. In your own words, explain why baptism is important but is not what saves us. How would you kindly answer someone who points to Acts 2:38?
7. Have you been baptized since trusting Christ? If not, what is holding you back?
8. If you have been baptized, what do you remember about that day? How could you encourage someone else to take this step?

Take the Next Step

If you have trusted Christ and haven't been baptized, contact a pastor this week and ask about being baptized. If you have been baptized, take a few minutes to thank God for what your baptism pictures, then read Romans 6:1-14 and write down one part of your "old life" you want to leave in the grave for good.

Chapter 11: The Church: You Belong to a Family

> *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 where that comes from. Maybe you've been hurt by church people. Maybe you've seen hypocrisy, or sat through services that felt dead. Maybe you just figure you can worship God on your own, out on the lake or in your living room.

But the Bible doesn't leave room for a Christian who goes it alone. When God saved you, He didn't only save you from something. He saved you into something. He made you part of a family. In this chapter, we'll look at what the church is, why you need it, and what it looks like to be a faithful part of a local church, including worship, the Lord's Supper, and giving.

Whether I was at church camp, on youth mission trips to Baja or rebuilding my life in 2020, the picture of the church as a family has meant the most to me. A family knows your flaws, tells you the truth and still pulls up a chair for you. Believers are no longer strangers but members of God's household (Ephesians 2:19).

What the Church Is

When most people hear the word church, they think of a building. But in the Bible, the church is never a building. The Greek word, ekklesia, means an assembly or a gathering of people who have been called out. The church is people, those whom God has called out of darkness into His light through faith in Jesus.

The Bible uses the word in two ways. Sometimes it means all believers everywhere, in every age. Jesus said, "on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Every true believer is part of that church the moment they are saved. But most of the time in the New Testament, church means a local group of believers who meet together in one place, like "the church of God which is in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2). God's plan is for every believer to belong to a local church.

The New Testament gives us several pictures of the church.

- **A body.** "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Every part needs the others, and Christ is the head.
- **A family.** We are "members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). God is our Father, and other believers are our brothers and sisters.
- **A building or temple.** Believers are being built together into a dwelling place of God by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22; 1 Peter 2:5).
- **A bride.** Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The church is precious to Him.

That last one is worth thinking about. Jesus died for the church. If you love Jesus, you can't despise what He loves. You can't say, "I love you, but I can't stand your bride."

What the First Church Did

Right after the day of Pentecost, when about three thousand people trusted Christ and were baptized, Luke describes what the new church did.

> *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.* (Acts 2:42)

That one verse gives us four marks of a healthy church that still apply today.

The teaching of the apostles. They gathered to learn the truth. Today, we have the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. A healthy church teaches the Bible faithfully, week after week.

The fellowship. The Greek word is koinonia, which means sharing life together. They didn't just sit in rows. They shared meals, needs, and lives (Acts 2:44-46).

The breaking of the bread. This includes the Lord's Supper, which we'll look at in a moment, and likely shared meals as well.

The prayers. They prayed together. A church that doesn't pray is just a club.

Then look at the result: "the Lord was adding to the church every day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). When God's people do these things, God grows His church.

Why You Need the Church

The writer of Hebrews tells us not to forsake "the assembling together of ourselves, as is the custom of some" (Hebrews 10:25). Even in the first century, some believers were skipping church. Here are a few reasons the Bible says you need a local church, and it needs you.

You need to be taught. God gave pastors and teachers to equip His people, "so that we may no longer be infants, being tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching" (Ephesians 4:14). A new believer who never sits under good teaching is easy prey for false ideas.

You need encouragement. The Christian life is hard. Hebrews 10:24-25 says we gather to stir one another up "of love and of good works" and to encourage one another. Picture a log in a campfire. While it's in the fire with the others, it burns bright. Pull it out and set it off by itself, and it soon goes cold. Christians are the same.

You need accountability. We all have blind spots. Galatians 6:1-2 tells spiritual believers to gently restore a brother who stumbles and to "bear one another's burdens." That only happens when people know each other.

You need shepherds. God gives His church elders or pastors to watch over His people (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3). Hebrews 13:17 says they "keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." A sheep that wanders off from the flock is in danger.

The church needs you. God has given every believer gifts to build up the body (1 Corinthians 12:7). If you're not there, something is missing. Paul says the body grows as "each individual part" does its share (Ephesians 4:16). We'll talk more about that in Chapter 13.

Finding a Good Church

No church is perfect, because every church is full of forgiven sinners. If you find a perfect church, don't join it, because you'll ruin it. But some things matter a great deal. When you look for a church, here are some questions to ask.

1. Does it teach the Bible as God's Word, and does the preaching actually explain what the Bible says? Be like the Bereans, who examined the Scriptures daily to see whether what they heard was true (Acts 17:11).
2. Does it preach the gospel clearly: salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again?
3. Does it believe what Christians have always believed about who God is, including the Trinity and that Jesus is fully God and fully man?
4. Do the people love one another and welcome outsiders (John 13:34-35)?
5. Are the leaders people of godly character who live what they teach, and is there accountability for leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)?
6. Does it practice baptism and the Lord's Supper, and help people grow, serve, and reach others?

Once you find a church like that, commit. Join it. Many churches have a membership process, a way of saying, "I belong here, and I'm committed to these people." Show up even when you don't feel like it. Get to know people. Join a small group if your church has them. It takes time for a church to feel like family, but it will if you stick with it.

And when someone in the church lets you down, and someone will, remember how much God has forgiven you. Deal with it the way Jesus taught (Matthew 18:15), and don't run off at the first problem.

The Lord's Supper

On the night before He died, Jesus gave His church a meal to remember Him by. Paul describes it this way.

> *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)

Christians call this the Lord's Supper, Communion, or the Lord's Table. Here is what it means.

It is a remembrance. Jesus said, "do this in My remembrance." The bread pictures His body given for us, and the cup pictures His blood that sealed the new covenant. Every time we take it, we remember the cross.

It is a proclamation. Paul says, "you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes." When the church takes the Lord's Supper, it is preaching the gospel without saying a word.

It looks forward. We do it "until He comes." Every time we take the Supper, we're reminded that Jesus is coming back. Jesus said He would drink it new with us in His Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

It is a time of self-examination. Paul warns against taking it "unworthily" and tells each person to "examine himself" first (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). In Corinth, some were getting drunk at the meal while others went hungry, and they were treating it like any other dinner. Taking it worthily doesn't mean you have to be perfect. Nobody would ever take it. It means coming humbly, confessing your sin, and making things right with others.

Christians have understood the Lord's Supper in different ways. Roman Catholics teach that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ. Lutherans believe Christ is truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine. Many Reformed churches teach that Christ is spiritually present and nourishes believers through it. Many Baptist and other evangelical churches see it as a memorial. I understand it as a remembrance and proclamation that Jesus commanded, a time when we look back to the cross, look inward in honest self-examination, look around at the family of God, and look ahead to His return. Whatever your church's view, the Lord's Supper is for believers, and Jesus wants His people to take it.

Giving

Giving is one of the most practical ways a believer takes part in the life of the church. It is also one of the most misunderstood.

The Old Testament law required Israel to give a tithe, which means a tenth, of their crops and herds to support the priests and the temple (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21). Many Christians today give a tenth of their income as a starting point, and that is a good, biblical pattern to follow. Others believe the New Testament doesn't set a fixed percentage. What the New Testament does teach is clear, and it actually asks more of the heart than a percentage does.

> *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.* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Here are the principles the New Testament gives for giving.

- **Give regularly.** Paul told the Corinthians to set something aside "On every first day of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- **Give in proportion to what God has given you.** Paul said to give "whatever he may be prospered" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Those who have more should give more.
- **Give generously.** "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." The poor widow who gave two small coins gave more in God's eyes than the rich, because she gave all she had (Mark 12:41-44).
- **Give cheerfully.** "God loves a cheerful giver." Not grudgingly or under pressure, but gladly, because you want to.

- **Give first to your local church**, which feeds you spiritually (Galatians 6:6), and then as God leads to help others in need and to support the spread of the gospel (Philippians 4:15-18).

Why does God want us to give? Not because He needs our money. He owns everything (Psalm 50:10-12). He wants our hearts. Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Money has a way of taking God's place in our lives. Giving breaks its grip. It's a way of saying, "God, You are my provider, and all I have is Yours."

If you've never given before, start somewhere. Pray about it, decide what you will give, and do it regularly. Then watch how God takes care of you.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between thinking of the church as a building and thinking of it as people?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. Which of the four things the first church did do you think churches today most need to recover?
3. Which of the pictures of the church (body, family, temple, bride) means the most to you, and why?
4. Read Hebrews 10:24-25. Why do you think some believers stop meeting with other Christians? What does that cost them?
5. Look at the questions for finding a good church. Which ones do you think matter most?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. What are we to remember and proclaim when we take the Lord's Supper? How should we prepare for it?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. What does it mean to be a cheerful giver?
8. What is one step you could take this month to become a more faithful part of a local church?

Take the Next Step

If you don't have a church home, visit a Bible-teaching church this Sunday. If you do, take one step closer: introduce yourself to someone you don't know, sign up for a small group or class, or talk with a pastor about membership. Then make a plan for regular giving and start this week.

Chapter 12: Prayer and God's Word: Growing Closer to God

> *like newborn babies, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow*
>
> 1 Peter 2:2 (SLB)

Salvation is the beginning of a relationship, not the end of a transaction. When you trusted Christ, you didn't just get a ticket to heaven stamped and filed away. You came to know God as your Father. And like any relationship, it grows through time spent together.

How do you spend time with God? He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. We speak to Him through prayer. Those two habits are the heartbeat of the Christian life. Peter says new believers should be like newborn babies who crave milk, so that they grow. A baby who won't eat doesn't grow. A Christian who doesn't take in God's Word and talk with Him stays a spiritual infant.

In this chapter, we'll look at both, and I'll give you some simple ways to get started.

God Has Spoken

The Bible is not just a book about God. It is God's Word to us.

> *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)

The word translated "God-breathed" is theopneustos. It means that Scripture came out of God Himself. God used human writers, with their own personalities and styles, over about fifteen hundred years. But the Holy Spirit carried them along so that what they wrote was exactly what God wanted said (2 Peter 1:20-21). That's why Jesus could say, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Look at what Paul says Scripture does. It teaches us what is true. It reproves us, showing us where we're wrong. It corrects us, showing us how to get right. And it trains us in righteousness, showing us how to stay right. The result is a believer who is "complete, fully equipped for every good work." Remember Ephesians 2:10 from Chapter 9? God has prepared good works for you. His Word is how He equips you to do them.

Why Read the Bible?

Here are a few of the reasons the Bible gives for spending time in it.

It feeds you. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Your soul needs God's Word as much as your body needs food.

It guides you. "A lamp to my foot is Your word, and a light to my pathway" (Psalm 119:105). In the ancient world, a lamp didn't light up the whole road. It showed you the next step or two. God's Word may not tell you everything about your future, but it will always show you the next right step.

It protects you from sin. "In my heart I have treasured Your word, so that I will not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). When temptation comes, a verse you know by heart is a weapon. Jesus fought temptation with Scripture, and so can we.

It shows you yourself. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). It goes deep and exposes what is really going on in our hearts.

It changes you. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in Your truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17). God uses His Word to make us more like Jesus.

It lasts. "Grass dries up, a flower withers, and the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8). Everything else you read will fade. God's Word won't.

How to Read the Bible

Many new believers open the Bible at Genesis, start strong, and get stuck somewhere in Leviticus. Don't feel bad if that has happened to you. The Bible is not one book but sixty-six books, written in different styles: history, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, Gospels, and letters. Here are some practical tips.

1. **Start with the Gospel of John.** John wrote his Gospel "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). Then read Mark, Acts, Romans, and Ephesians. After that, mix the Old and New Testaments. The reading plan in Appendix B will help.
2. **Pick a time and a place.** Most people find it easiest first thing in the morning, before the day takes over. Jesus Himself rose early, "very much night," and went to a deserted place to pray (Mark 1:35). But any time works if you are consistent. Ten or fifteen minutes a day is better than an hour once a month.
3. **Pray before you read.** Ask God to open your eyes. Psalm 119:18 is a good prayer: "Uncover my eyes, and let me look at wonderful things from Your law."
4. **Read a manageable amount.** A chapter is plenty for most people. It's better to read a little and understand it than to rush through a lot and forget it.
5. **Ask three simple questions.** What does it say? What does it mean? How should I live because of it? Read it plainly, the way the writer meant it, in its setting. Let Scripture explain Scripture.
6. **Write something down.** Keep a notebook or journal. Write down one verse that stood out and one thing you want to do because of it.
7. **Do what it says.** James says, "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). The goal isn't to fill your head. It's to change your life.
8. **Memorize some of it.** Pick one verse a week. Write it on a card, read it often, and say it out loud. You'll be amazed how God brings it back to mind when you need it.

Over time, you'll also want to learn from good teaching: sermons at your church, a Bible study group, or a good study book. Those are helpful, but they don't replace reading God's Word for yourself.

What Prayer Is

Prayer is simply talking with God. It isn't a performance. You don't need special words, a special tone of voice, or a special place. You can pray out loud or silently, kneeling or walking, in a church or in your truck. God is your Father, and He wants to hear from you.

Jesus warned against two kinds of wrong prayer. One is praying to be seen by people. The other is babbling, piling up words as if God hears you better if you talk longer (Matthew 6:5-7). Then He said something wonderful: "your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). You might ask, "Then why pray at all?" Because prayer isn't about informing God. It's about knowing Him, depending on Him, and being changed as you talk with Him.

Because of what Jesus did, you can come to God with confidence.

> *Let us therefore come with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help.* (Hebrews 4:16)

You come to "the throne of grace." Not a throne of judgment, but a throne of grace. Jesus, our High Priest, has opened the way. You can come with boldness, not because you're good enough, but because He is.

How to Pray

Jesus gave His disciples a model for prayer. We call it the Lord's Prayer.

> *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.* (Matthew 6:9-10)

He went on to teach them to ask for daily bread, for forgiveness as we forgive others, and for deliverance from temptation and from the evil one (Matthew 6:11-13). This prayer wasn't meant to be just repeated word for word, though that's fine to do. It's a pattern. It starts with God, His name, His kingdom, and His will, before it turns to our needs.

Here is a simple pattern many believers use, built on the letters of the word ACTS.

- **Adoration.** Praise God for who He is. Tell Him what you love about Him. The Psalms are full of examples.
- **Confession.** Tell God honestly where you have sinned, and receive His forgiveness. "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).
- **Thanksgiving.** Thank Him for what He has done: salvation, answered prayers, daily blessings. "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- **Supplication.** That's an old word for asking. Bring your needs and the needs of others to God. Pray for your family, your church, your pastor, your friends who don't know Christ, and our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

You don't have to follow a pattern every time. Sometimes the best prayer is just, "Help me, Lord." But a pattern can help keep your prayers from becoming a grocery list of wants.

Praying About Everything

Paul gives one of the most practical commands in the Bible about 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)

Notice the trade. You give God your anxiety, and He gives you His peace. Notice also what Paul says to pray about: "everything." Nothing is too small or too big. If it matters to you, it matters to your Father.

Paul also says, "Pray unceasingly" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). That doesn't mean you're on your knees twenty-four hours a day. It means you live in an ongoing conversation with God. You talk to Him in the car, at work, while you wash the dishes, and before you fall asleep.

When Prayers Seem Unanswered

Every believer eventually prays for something and doesn't get it. That can be confusing. Here are a few things the Bible says about it.

God answers in different ways. Sometimes He says yes. Sometimes He says no, because He knows better than we do. Sometimes He says wait. A good father doesn't give his child everything he asks for.

We pray according to His will. "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). Praying "in Jesus' name" (John 14:13-14) isn't a magic phrase to tack on the end. It means praying the way Jesus would, for what He wants.

Sin and wrong motives can block our prayers. James says some people "ask wrongly" because they only want to spend it on their pleasures (James 4:3). Psalm 66:18 says if we hold on to sin in our hearts, the Lord will not listen.

And sometimes we simply don't know why. Paul asked God three times to remove a painful "thorn in the flesh," and God said no. Instead, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). God doesn't always change our circumstances. But He always gives grace to go through them.

Jesus told a parable "about its being necessary always to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Keep praying.

Putting It Together

Here's a simple way to start. Pick a time each day. Begin by asking God to speak to you. Read a chapter of the Bible. Write down one verse and one thing to do. Then pray, using what you read to shape your prayer, and add the ACTS pattern. Fifteen minutes. That's it. Do it for thirty days, and you'll have a habit that can last a lifetime.

Some days it will feel rich, and some days it will feel dry. Keep going. Relationships aren't built on feelings alone. They're built on time spent together, day after day.

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What does it mean that Scripture is "God-breathed," and what does Scripture do in our lives?
2. Which of the reasons to read the Bible in this chapter means the most to you right now?
3. What has kept you from reading the Bible regularly? Which of the practical tips could help you most?
4. Read Psalm 1:1-3. What picture does this give of a person who delights in God's Word?
5. Read Matthew 6:5-13. What do we learn about prayer from what Jesus warned against and from the pattern He gave?
6. Read Hebrews 4:16. Why can a believer come to God with boldness?
7. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What are you anxious about right now that you could turn into prayer?
8. How do you handle prayers that seem unanswered? What does 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 teach about this?

Take the Next Step

Start the reading plan in Appendix B today. Set a time each day this week for fifteen minutes with God: read the day's chapter, write down one verse, and pray using the ACTS pattern. Pick one verse from your reading to memorize by the end of the week.

Chapter 13: Walking in the Spirit and Serving Others

> *But I say, walk by **the** Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out **the** desire of **the** flesh.*
>
> Galatians 5:16 (SLB)

Here is something nobody tells some new believers: the Christian life is a fight. When you trusted Christ, God gave you a new heart and His Holy Spirit. But your old habits, your old desires, and the world around you didn't go away. Many new Christians are shocked the first time they fall back into a sin they thought was behind them. Some start to wonder if they were ever saved at all.

If that's you, take heart. The struggle itself is a sign of new life. Before you knew Christ, you didn't fight sin much. Now there's a battle, because there's a new you that wants to please God.

In this chapter, we'll look at how to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, how to fight sin, what to do when you fall, and how God wants you to serve others with the gifts He has given you.

For years I knew the tug-of-war between wanting to follow God and giving in to a habit that tore down my life and hurt my family. Getting sober on May 29, 2020, showed me you cannot beat the flesh by grit. You have to walk with the Spirit every day (Galatians 5:16-17).

Two Forces at War

Paul describes the battle plainly.

> *But I say, walk by **the** Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out **the** desire of **the** flesh. For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are opposed to one another, so that the things which you wish, these you may not do.* (Galatians 5:16-17)

In the New Testament, the word "flesh" often doesn't just mean your body. It means the old sinful nature, the part of us that still wants to go its own way. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit living in you. The two pull in opposite directions.

The answer is not to try harder in your own strength. Paul's answer is, "walk by the Spirit." To walk by the Spirit means to live each day depending on Him, listening to Him through His Word, obeying what He shows you, and leaning on His power instead of your own. It's a step-by-step thing, like walking. You don't walk by the Spirit once and you're done. You do it one step at a time, one day at a time.

Paul also says, "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). He compares it to being drunk with wine, where something else controls you. To be filled with the Spirit is to be under His control, yielding to Him moment by moment. Every believer has the Spirit. The question is whether we let Him lead.

What the Spirit Produces

Paul lists what the flesh produces: sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, drunkenness, and more (Galatians 5:19-21). Then he lists what the Spirit produces.

> *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 says "fruit," singular, not fruits. These aren't nine separate things you pick and choose from. They are one harvest that grows together in a life led by the Spirit. And notice it's fruit, not works. Fruit isn't manufactured. It grows. You can't staple apples onto a dead tree. The Spirit grows these things in you as you stay connected to Christ.

That doesn't mean you sit back and do nothing. A farmer can't make a seed grow, but he can plow, plant, water, and pull weeds. You do your part by staying in God's Word, praying, being part of His church, and saying no to sin. God does what only He can do.

How to Fight Sin

The Bible gives us practical weapons in this fight.

Remember who you are. Paul says, "consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:11). When you trusted Christ, sin's power over you was broken. You don't have to obey it anymore. "For sin will not rule over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). You are not a sinner trying to become a saint. You are a saint, a person set apart for God, who sometimes sins.

Put off and put on. Paul tells us to "put off" the old man and "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:22-24). It isn't enough to stop doing wrong. You replace it with what's right. The liar starts telling the truth. The thief starts working and giving. The person with a filthy mouth starts speaking words that build others up (Ephesians 4:25-29).

Run from temptation. Some sins you fight. Others you flee. Paul says, "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and "flee youthful desires" (2 Timothy 2:22). Joseph didn't stand around and argue with Potiphar's wife. He ran (Genesis 39:12). If you know your weak spots, stay away from them. Don't keep the bottle in the house. Put a filter on your phone. Stop going to the places where you always fall.

Know that there is a way out. Here is one of the most practical promises in the Bible.

> *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)

You are never trapped. Every temptation comes with an exit door. Your job is to look for it and take it.

Resist the devil and draw near to God. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7-8). The enemy is real, but he's not stronger than the One who lives in you (1 John 4:4).

Don't fight alone. Find a mature believer of your own gender whom you can be honest with. James says to "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Sin grows in secret. It loses its power in the light.

When You Fall

You will sin. Every believer does. The question isn't whether you'll fall, but what you'll do when you do.

> *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)

To confess means to agree with God about your sin, to call it what He calls it, without excuses. When you do, God promises two things. He forgives, and He cleanses. Notice why: He is "faithful and righteous." God forgives you because He keeps His promises and because Jesus already paid for that sin on the cross. He isn't doing you a favor that He might change His mind about later.

Confessing doesn't save you all over again. If you're a believer, your relationship with God as your Father is secure, and your sins were paid for at the cross. But sin hurts your fellowship with Him, the way a child who disobeys is still his father's son but feels distant until he makes it right. Confession restores that closeness. Paul says not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). When we sin, we grieve Him. When we confess, we come back home.

Sometimes making it right also means going to someone you've hurt. Jesus said if you remember that your brother has something against you, go "first be reconciled to your brother" (Matthew 5:24). If you've stolen, pay it back. If you've lied about someone, set the record straight. Repentance shows up in action.

Then get back up and keep walking. Don't wallow. Proverbs 24:16 says a righteous man falls seven times and rises again. The devil wants you to stay down and believe you're worthless. God wants you to get up and keep going.

One Important Word About Getting Help

Some struggles are bigger than a few Bible verses and a good friend. If you are dealing with addiction, abuse, deep depression, thoughts of harming yourself, or anything that puts you or someone else in danger, please get help right away. Talk to your pastor, and see a doctor or a licensed Christian counselor. If you are in danger, call 911. In the United States, you can call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Getting help is not a lack of faith. God often works through people He has trained and placed in our path.

Saved to Serve

The Christian life isn't only about fighting sin. It's also about doing good, and one of the main ways we do that is by serving others. Jesus set the example.

> *But it will not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you will be your servant; and whoever of you desires to become first will be slave of all. For even the Son of Man*

> *did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.* (Mark 10:43-45)

The night before He died, Jesus took a towel and a basin and washed His disciples' dirty feet, a job usually done by the lowest servant in the house. Then He said, "For I gave you an example, so that even as I did to you, you also may do" (John 13:15). If the Lord of glory would wash feet, there's no job in God's kingdom that is beneath us.

God has given every believer at least one spiritual gift to use in serving 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)

A spiritual gift is an ability the Holy Spirit gives a believer for building up the church. Paul lists some of them in Romans 12:6-8: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. Other lists appear in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Christians disagree about whether some of the more unusual gifts, like speaking in tongues and healing, continue today in the same way they did in the early church. Good believers land on both sides of that question. What everyone agrees on is that every believer has been gifted to serve, and that "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

How do you find your gift? Start serving. Try different things in your church: greeting people, working with children, helping with meals, visiting the sick, teaching a class, setting up chairs, praying with people. Pay attention to what you enjoy, what God seems to bless, and what other believers say you are good at. Over time, your gifts will become clear. Don't wait until you know your gift to start serving. You'll find it by serving.

Serving in Everyday Life

Serving God isn't limited to what you do at church. Paul told Christian slaves in his day, and his words apply to every worker today, "whatever you do, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). Your job is a place to serve Christ. Show up on time. Do honest work. Treat your boss and coworkers with respect. You may be the only Bible some of them ever read.

Your home is a place to serve too. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). Parents bring up your children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Children honor your parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).

And your community is a place to serve. James says that pure religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation" (James 1:27). Jesus said that when we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and the prisoner, we are doing it to Him (Matthew 25:35-40).

Picture a retired man named Ed who can't do much heavy lifting anymore. He decides to call three widows from his church every week just to check on them. One of them tells her daughter that Ed's calls are the only thing that got her through the winter. Ed never preached a sermon or led a Bible study. But he found the good works God prepared for him.

Study Questions

1. Read Galatians 5:16-25. In your own words, what is the battle between the flesh and the Spirit?
2. What does it mean to walk by the Spirit and to be filled with the Spirit in your everyday life?
3. Which part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) do you most want God to grow in you right now?
4. Which of the weapons for fighting sin in this chapter do you most need to use? Is there a temptation you need to run from instead of fight?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. How does this promise change the way you think about temptation?
6. Read 1 John 1:9. Why do you think some believers have a hard time confessing sin and receiving forgiveness?
7. Read Mark 10:43-45 and John 13:12-17. What does Jesus' example teach us about serving?
8. Where are you serving others right now, at church, at home, at work, or in your community? Where could you start?

Take the Next Step

Ask your pastor or a church leader this week where help is needed, and sign up to serve somewhere, even if it's small. Also, if there is a sin you keep falling into, tell one trusted believer about it this week and ask them to pray with you and check on you.

Chapter 14: Telling Others and Living for Eternity

> *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)

Think back to the person who first told you about Jesus. Maybe it was a parent or grandparent. Maybe a friend invited you to church, a coworker gave you a Bible, or a stranger handed you a tract. Whoever it was, somebody cared enough to tell you. If they hadn't, where would you be?

Now it's your turn. God's plan for your life includes passing on the good news to others. And He has given us a powerful reason to do it with urgency and joy: Jesus is coming back. This last chapter brings those two things together.

Every Believer Is a Witness

Jesus' last words before He returned to heaven were about this.

> *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)

Notice what Jesus said. He didn't say, "You might be witnesses if you have the gift of evangelism." He said, "you will be witnesses to Me." A witness is simply someone who tells what they have seen and heard. In a courtroom, a witness doesn't have to be a lawyer. He just has to tell the truth about what he knows.

Notice also where the power comes from: "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." You don't have to be bold or eloquent on your own. The same Spirit who lives in you will give you the words and the courage.

And notice the pattern of where they were to go: Jerusalem (their home city), Judea and Samaria (the region around them, including people they didn't like), and to the uttermost part of the earth. For you, that might mean your family, your neighborhood and workplace, the people who are different from you, and the whole world through prayer, giving, and maybe going yourself.

Paul says we are "ambassadors" for Christ, "as though God were urging through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador represents his country in a foreign land. You represent Jesus where you live and work. Your message is the one Paul gives: "be reconciled to God."

Why People Don't Share Their Faith

If you're like most Christians, you know you should tell others about Jesus, but you don't do it much. Here are some of the most common reasons, and what the Bible says about each.

"I'm afraid of what people will think." That's honest. Nobody likes to be rejected. But Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). When we remember that the gospel is "the power of

God for salvation," we realize the problem isn't the message. It's our fear. Ask God for boldness. The early church did exactly that, and God answered (Acts 4:29-31).

"I don't know enough." You know more than you think. If you've read this book, you know how God's plan works from beginning to end. And you don't have to have every answer. When a man Jesus healed of blindness was questioned by the religious leaders, he said, "one thing I know, that being blind, now I see" (John 9:25). You can always tell what Jesus has done for you.

"It's not my job. That's what pastors are for." Pastors are called to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). The saints are you and me. Many people who come to Christ do so through a friend or family member, not a sermon.

"I don't want to push my beliefs on anyone." Neither do I. Sharing the gospel isn't pushing. Think of it this way: if you knew a cure for a deadly disease and kept it to yourself, would that be respectful? Peter tells us to share "with gentleness and fear," which means with kindness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). We offer. We don't force.

Tell Your Story

One of the simplest and most powerful ways to share your faith is to tell your own story. When Jesus set a man free from a legion of demons, the man wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus told 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).

The Samaritan woman Jesus met at a well went back to her town and said, "Come, see a man who told me all things that I did" (John 4:29). John says many believed because of what she told them (John 4:39).

If you did the next step at the end of Chapter 6, you've already written your story down. If not, here's a simple outline.

1. **Before.** What was your life like before you trusted Christ? What were you looking for? Keep it honest, but don't glorify your past sins.
2. **How.** How did you come to understand the gospel and trust Christ? Be sure to say clearly what you believed: that you were a sinner, that Jesus died and rose for you, and that you trusted Him.
3. **After.** What has changed since then? Don't claim life is perfect now. Talk about the peace, hope, forgiveness, and purpose God has given you.

Practice telling it in about three minutes. You'll be surprised how often God gives you a chance to share it.

Share the Gospel Clearly

Your story opens the door, but the gospel is what saves. People need to hear the message itself. "How will they believe in Him of whom they did not hear?" (Romans 10:14).

Here is one simple way to walk someone through the gospel using verses from Romans. Many Christians call it the Romans Road.

- **Everyone has sinned.** Romans 3:23: "for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

- **Sin brings death.** Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- **Christ died for us.** Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- **We are saved by faith in Him.** Romans 10:9: "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."
- **Everyone who calls will be saved.** Romans 10:13: "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

You don't need to memorize a speech. Just know these truths and the verses that go with them, and ask God to give you opportunities. Then pray for the people in your life by name. Ask God to open their hearts the way He opened Lydia's (Acts 16:14). Make a short list of three to five people who don't know Christ, and pray for them every day.

And remember, your job is to be faithful, not to produce results. Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing it to grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). Some will believe. Some won't. Some will believe years later because of a seed you planted. Leave the results to God.

Jesus Is Coming Again

The second half of this chapter turns our eyes to the future. The Christian life is lived with eternity in view. Jesus made His followers a promise.

> *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 14:2-3)

I believe the Bible teaches that the next great event on God's calendar is the coming of Jesus for His church, often called the rapture. The word rapture comes from the Latin translation of "caught away" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Paul describes it this way.

> *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.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

At that moment, believers who have died will be raised with new bodies, and believers who are still alive will be changed "in an instant, in the blink of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52) and caught up to meet the Lord. Paul says, "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

I hold to what is called the pre-tribulation view. I believe Christ will come for His church before a seven-year period of judgment on the earth that the Bible calls the Tribulation. Paul says, "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 in Philadelphia, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world" (Revelation 3:10). After the Tribulation, Christ will return visibly to the earth with His saints in power and glory (Revelation 19:11-16), defeat His enemies, and set up His thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6). God also has a future for the nation of Israel, and He

will keep every promise He made to them (Romans 11:25-29). Other believers understand the timing of these events differently, and I cover these passages in detail in my Revelation study. But all Bible-believing Christians agree on the most important thing: Jesus is coming again, bodily and personally, and we should be ready.

Paul calls Christ's coming "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). It's not something believers need to fear. It's something we look forward to. At the end of the Bible, Jesus says, "Yes, I am coming quickly," and John answers for all of us: "Amen. Yes, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Every believer will one day stand before Jesus, not to find out whether we're saved, but to give an account of how we lived.

> *For it is necessary for all of us to be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive back the things* ***done*** *through the body, according to what he did, whether good or evil.* (2 Corinthians 5:10)

This is called the judgment seat of Christ. The Greek word for judgment seat is bema, the raised platform where a judge sat, whether in a court or at the athletic games. It is not about punishment for sin. Jesus already took that, and "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). It is about rewards.

Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. Jesus is the only foundation. Each of us builds on that foundation with our lives, either with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and straw. Fire will test the work. What lasts will be rewarded. What burns up will be lost, but the believer "himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

That should make us think hard about how we spend our time, money, and energy. Paul looked forward to a "crown of righteousness," which the Lord will give "not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). The things we do for Christ, even "a cup of cold water" given in the name of a disciple (Matthew 10:42), will not be forgotten.

Home at Last

And then, forever, we will be home. John saw what's coming.

> *And I heard a loud voice out of heaven, saying, "Look, the tabernacle of God* ***is*** *with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them, their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer, because the first things passed away."* (Revelation 21:3-4)

This is where the road home finally ends. Not in a cloud with a harp, but in a new heaven and a new earth, where God lives with His people face to face. No more tears. No more death. No more pain. No more sin. What Adam and Eve lost in the garden, Jesus will restore and more. We were made to walk with God, and in the end, that is exactly what we will do, forever.

Living Now in Light of Then

How should that hope change the way we live today? John says, “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). Peter asks, “what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11)? Paul says, “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not empty in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Living for eternity means keeping the long view. The bills, the arguments, the setbacks, and the losses of this life are real, but they are temporary. Paul calls our troubles a “momentary lightness” compared to “an eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

It also means urgency. Jesus may come today. And every person we know will spend eternity somewhere. Peter says the reason the Lord hasn’t come yet is that 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 you love to come home.

Study Questions

1. Who first told you about Jesus? What did they do or say that made a difference?
2. Read Acts 1:8. What does it mean to be a witness? Where is your “Jerusalem,” your “Judea and Samaria,” and your “uttermost part of the earth”?
3. Which of the reasons people don’t share their faith is most true of you? What does the Bible say to that?
4. Using the before, how, and after outline, practice telling your story in three minutes with someone in your group.
5. Walk through the Romans Road verses. Could you explain the gospel to a friend using them?
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How do these verses encourage believers who have lost a loved one in Christ?
7. Read 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. What kinds of things do you think count as gold, silver, and precious stones in a believer’s life?
8. How does knowing that Jesus is coming again change the way you want to live this week?

Take the Next Step

Write down the names of three to five people in your life who don’t know Christ. Pray for each of them by name every day this week. Ask God to give you one natural opportunity to share your story or the gospel with one of them, and watch for it.

A Closing Word: Welcome Home

> *And having risen up, he went to his own father. But while he was still far distant, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and having run, he fell on his neck and kissed him.*
>
> Luke 15:20 (SLB)

Jesus told a story about a young man who demanded his inheritance early, left home, and wasted every cent of it on wild living. When the money ran out, a famine hit, and he ended up feeding pigs, so hungry he wanted to eat what the pigs were eating. Then, Jesus said, he came to his senses. He decided to go home and ask his father to take him on as a hired servant (Luke 15:11-19).

He had his speech ready. But look at the verse above. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him, was moved with compassion, ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. The son started his speech, but the father wasn't listening. He was already calling for the best robe, a ring, sandals, and a feast. "This son of mine was dead and came to life again, and he was lost and was found" (Luke 15:24).

That is the whole message of this book in one picture. God made you for Himself. Sin took you far from home. But the Father has been watching the road for you, and through His Son, Jesus, He has made a way back. You don't come home by cleaning yourself up or earning your place. You come home by turning around and trusting Him. And when you do, He doesn't make you a hired servant. He makes you His child.

Then the party starts, and a new life begins. You belong to a family now. You have a Father to talk to, a Book to feed on, a Spirit to walk with, brothers and sisters to serve alongside, good works prepared ahead of time for you to walk in, and a world full of people who need to hear the same good news. None of that earns your place at the table. All of it is what it looks like to live in the Father's house.

I hope this book has done what I set out to do: make the road home plain, so that you can walk it yourself and point others to it. If you have never turned to Christ, don't put it off. Go back to Chapter 6 and settle it with God today. If you have trusted Him, keep walking. Get baptized if you haven't. Find your church. Open your Bible tomorrow morning. Pray. Serve. Tell someone. And keep looking up, because the One who saved you is coming back for you.

Remember the promise in Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." He started it. He will finish it. Welcome home.

If you have questions about anything in this book, or if you trusted Christ while reading it, I would be glad to hear from you at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

Appendix A: The Road Home at a Glance

This page gathers the whole road home in one place, with one key verse for each step. Read it often, memorize the verses, and use it to explain the gospel to someone else.

God's Plan

And God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27)

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

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

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

*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)

The Road to Salvation

*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)

Repent therefore and turn again, so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19)

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)

*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* (Romans 10:9)

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)

*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)

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)

Living Out God's Plan

For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

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)

*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)

Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6)

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

*But I say, walk by **the** Spirit, and you will certainly not carry out **the** desire of **the** flesh.* (Galatians 5:16)

*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)

*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)

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

Appendix B: Your First Thirty Days

If you have just trusted Christ, these first thirty days can set the pattern for the rest of your life. Each day, read the passage listed, write down one verse that stands out, and pray. Check off each day as you go. If you miss a day, don't quit. Just pick up where you left off.

Day	Read	Done
1	John 1: Jesus, the Word made flesh	
2	John 2: The first sign at Cana	
3	John 3: You must be born from above	
4	John 4: The woman at the well	
5	John 5: From death into life	
6	John 6: The bread of life	
7	John 7: Rivers of living water	
8	John 8: The truth will set you free	
9	John 9: A blind man sees	
10	John 10: The good shepherd	
11	John 11: The resurrection and the life	
12	John 12: The hour has come	
13	John 13: Jesus washes feet	
14	John 14: The way, the truth, and the life	
15	John 15: The vine and the branches	
16	John 16: The work of the Holy Spirit	
17	John 17: Jesus prays for us	
18	John 18: The arrest and trials	
19	John 19: The cross	
20	John 20: The empty tomb	
21	John 21: Peter restored	
22	Psalm 23 and Psalm 51	
23	Romans 3: All have sinned	
24	Romans 5: Peace with God	
25	Romans 6: Dead to sin, alive to God	
26	Romans 8: No condemnation	
27	Ephesians 2: By grace through faith	
28	Acts 2: The first church	
29	Galatians 5: Walking by the Spirit	
30	1 John 1 and 2: Walking in the light	

Habits for Your First Thirty Days

- ☐ Tell another believer that you have trusted Christ.
- ☐ Talk with a pastor about being baptized.
- ☐ Visit a Bible-teaching church, and go back the next week.
- ☐ Spend about fifteen minutes each day reading and praying.
- ☐ Memorize Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 John 5:13.
- ☐ Write down the story of how you came to Christ (Chapter 14).
- ☐ Make a list of three to five people you will pray for by name.

After Thirty Days

When you finish, read the Gospel of Mark, then Acts, Romans, and Ephesians. After that, start reading through the Old Testament alongside the New: a chapter of Genesis, a psalm, and a chapter of the New Testament each day works well for many people. My verse-by-verse studies of John, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, and other books of the Bible are free to read and download at trinfinityenterprises.com, along with the complete Steadfast Literal Bible.

Appendix C: Words to Know

Here are some of the words used in this book, in plain language, with the chapter where each one is explained.

- **Adoption:** God's act of making a believer His own child, with all the rights of a son or daughter (Chapter 7).
- **Assurance:** The settled confidence, based on God's promises, that you belong to Him and have eternal life (Chapter 8).
- **Atonement:** A covering for sin that brings a sinner back to God, through the death of a substitute (Chapter 3).
- **Baptism:** The believer's public step of obedience that pictures being buried and raised with Christ (Chapter 10).
- **Church:** The people God has called to Himself through Christ, both all believers everywhere and a local gathering of believers (Chapter 11).
- **Confession:** Agreeing with God about your sin and calling it what He calls it (Chapters 12 and 13).
- **Covenant:** A binding agreement. The new covenant is God's promise to forgive sins and write His law on our hearts through Christ (Chapter 3).
- **Eternal life:** The life of God given to everyone who believes in Jesus, beginning now and lasting forever (Chapters 6 and 8).
- **Faith:** Knowing the truth of the gospel, agreeing it is true, and trusting Jesus Christ personally to save you (Chapter 6).
- **Flesh:** In many New Testament passages, the old sinful nature that still pulls against God (Chapter 13).
- **Glorification:** The final step of salvation, when believers are made completely like Christ, body and soul (Chapter 7).
- **Gospel:** The good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day (Chapter 4).
- **Grace:** God's kindness to people who don't deserve it and could never repay it (Chapter 5).
- **Justification:** God's act of declaring a sinner not guilty and fully righteous because of Christ (Chapter 7).
- **Lord's Supper:** The meal Jesus gave His church to remember His death and proclaim it until He comes (Chapter 11).
- **Mercy:** God not giving us the punishment we deserve (Chapter 5).
- **Propitiation:** A sacrifice that satisfies God's justice and turns away His wrath against sin (Chapter 4).
- **Rapture:** The coming of Christ for His church, when believers who have died are raised and living believers are caught up to meet Him (Chapter 14).
- **Regeneration:** The new birth, God's work of giving spiritual life to a person dead in sin (Chapter 7).
- **Repentance:** A change of mind about God, sin, and yourself that turns your life toward God (Chapter 6).
- **Sanctification:** The lifelong work of the Holy Spirit making a believer more like Jesus (Chapters 7 and 13).
- **Sin:** Missing the mark of God's perfect standard, and rebelling against Him, in thought, word, or deed (Chapter 2).
- **Spiritual gift:** An ability the Holy Spirit gives a believer for building up the church (Chapter 13).
- **Tribulation:** A future seven-year period of judgment on the earth before Christ returns to reign (Chapter 14).

- **Trinity:** The Bible's teaching that there is one God who exists eternally as three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Chapter 4).

About This Book

The Road Home walks through the whole story of salvation in plain words, from the first page of the Bible to the last.

Part One shows God's plan: why He made us, what sin did to us, how He promised a Savior through the whole Old Testament, and how He kept that promise in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again.

Part Two answers the most important question anyone can ask: "What must I do to be saved?" It explains grace, repentance, and faith, what God does in a person the moment they believe, and how a believer can know they have eternal life. It gives the main views fairly where Bible-believing Christians disagree.

Part Three describes the life that follows. Baptism, the church, the Lord's Supper, giving, prayer, the Bible, walking in the Spirit, serving, telling others, and living in light of Christ's return are never ways to earn salvation. They are the good works God prepared for His children to walk in.

Every chapter ends with study questions and one simple next step, so the book works for personal reading, a new believers class, a small group, or two friends meeting over coffee. At the back are a one-page summary of the road home, a thirty-day plan for new believers, and a list of words to know.

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