

GROW

a guide for maturing believers

RESONATE CHURCH

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This Book Belongs To:

If Found Please Contact:



Seeds ⁰⁶

I want to follow Jesus, now what?

Salvation ¹²

Why did Jesus have to die?

Transformation ²⁰

What does it really mean to live a new life?

Our Mission ³⁰

What are we doing here?

Being a Disciple ³⁸

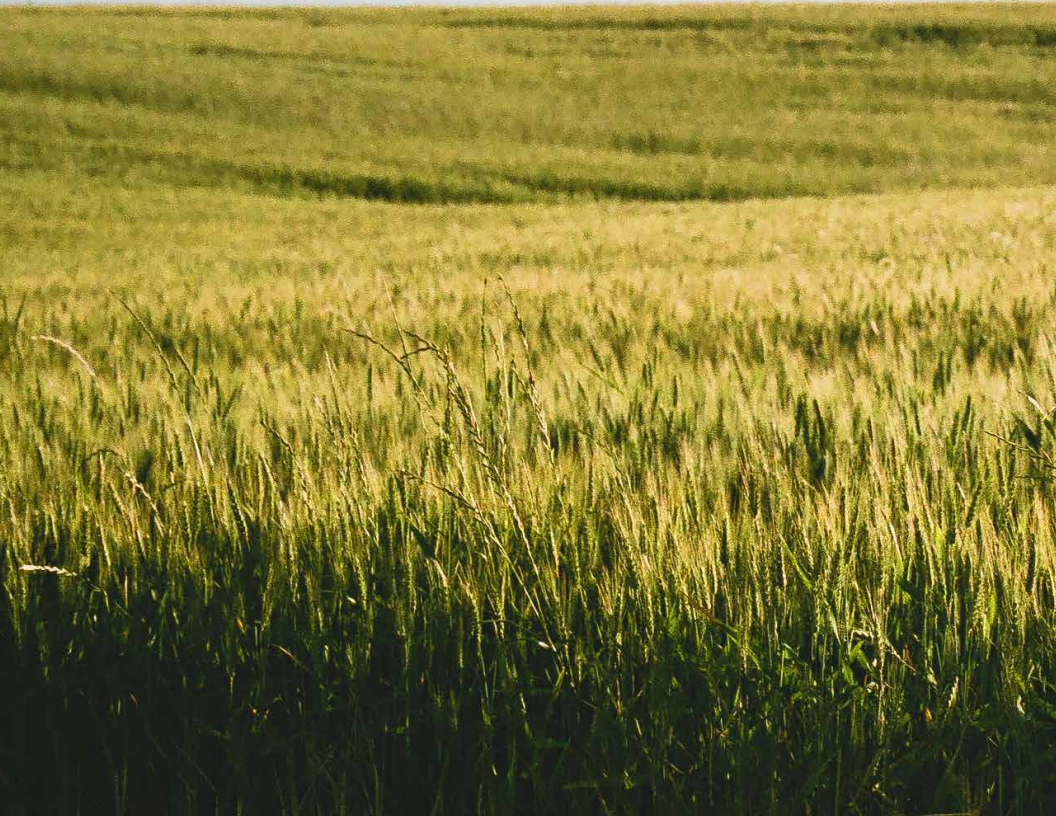
What does it mean to follow Jesus?

The Bible ⁴⁶

What is the Bible and how do I read it?

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Prayer⁶²

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*What is my new purpose
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01

Seeds

I want to follow Jesus, now what?

Discuss:

Did you grow up in church?

Do you remember the first time you heard the gospel, or heard about Jesus?

What was your first reaction?

What influenced your decision to follow Jesus?

If you haven't decided to follow Jesus yet, what influenced your decision to learn more about what it means to follow Him?



Luke 8:4-8, 11-15

⁴ While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: ⁵“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. ⁶ Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

¹¹ “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Someone responding to the message of Jesus is in a precarious situation. When you hear what God has done for you and what you are guilty of, it's a lot to take in. Indeed, there are many forces at work that make the step of faith and putting your trust in God and what he has done for you difficult:

1. This faith is counter cultural, so you must overcome what people may say or think about your faith.
2. It goes against some of your own habits and the ways you have functioned in life for a long time. Faith in Christ requires you to repeatedly choose new ways of thinking that differ from desires you've developed over the years.
3. There are even spiritual forces working against you believing and placing your faith in Jesus. (Think about the "birds" in the sower parable). These spiritual forces will use anything to push you back to your old ways and keep you blinded to the goodness of God and the joy of His salvation.

The rest of this booklet is designed to help you sink your roots into Christ and persevere in your faith. It will help you get into the bible and give you some foundational understanding of key topics and core principles of Christianity. God is pursuing you.

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If the seeds of God's gospel have fallen into your life, what are the conditions of your soil? Where do you sense the greatest threat to keeping the seed from taking root and producing a crop?

Have you already sensed pushes from these three areas against believing in God and what He has done for you?

How do I know when God is speaking to me and how do I respond?

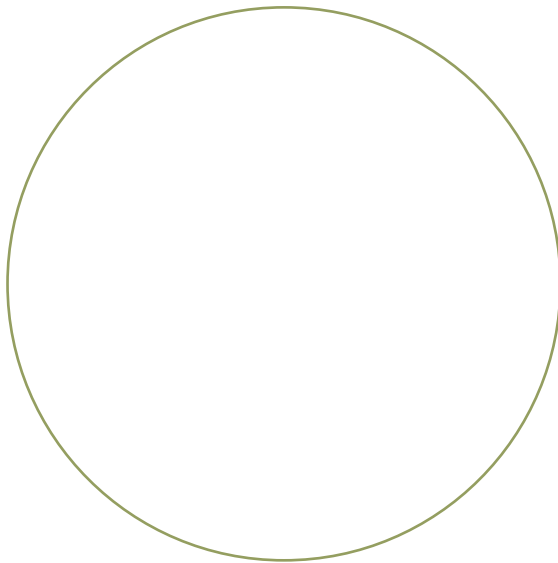
From the moment that you step off “the throne” of your life and allow Jesus to be Master and King, you are submitting and trusting His leadership in your life. To follow Jesus, we are constantly asking these 2 questions:

What is God saying to me?

Whether that be through His word (the Bible), through community, or through prayer, God is always speaking to you.

What am I going to do about it?

When God speaks to us, we have to respond in obedience, otherwise He is not the master of our lives. So when He speaks, we respond.



Mark 1:9-15

02

Salvation

Why did Jesus have to die?



Discuss:

*What do you think of when you
hear the word salvation?*

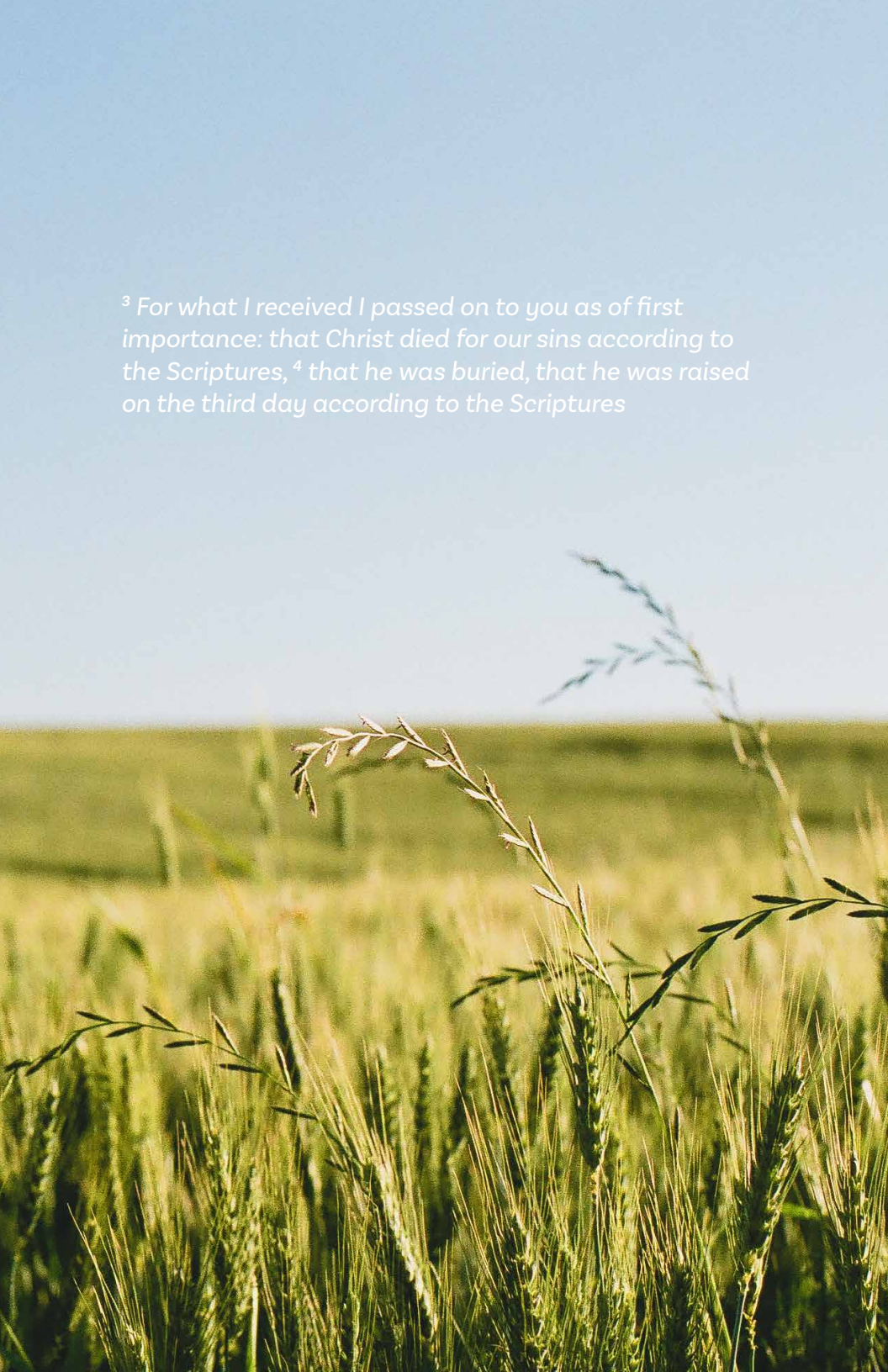
What have you heard about sin?

What connotation does it have for you?

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.



A photograph of a lush green wheat field under a clear, bright blue sky. The wheat stalks are in the foreground, some in sharp focus and others blurred, creating a sense of depth. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a sunny day. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

As we begin, we want to start with the ideas that define our faith. In the Bible, a man named Paul, who God used to spread our faith in the 1st century, wrote a number of letters to help establish the beliefs of new Christians in the early church. These letters make up a large portion of the New Testament.

In one of these letters to the Corinthian church, Paul stresses the gospel, or the good news, that “Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again” (1 Corinthians 15:4) as of first and utmost importance. Prior to its use as a Christian term, the word gospel (which is the Greek word “euangelion”) referred to the reward given to a messenger who brought good news.

Eventually, the term came to represent the good news itself – news of military victory or of an escape from danger. Paul applied this word to our faith to illustrate the victory of Christ in the battle that persisted since the beginning of mankind. The Bible is where we find the backstory of this battle and learn why the victory is truly good news. Since the gospel is what Christianity revolves around, this is where we will start.

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Open to Romans 5

The book of Romans is another letter written by Paul, this time to the church in Rome. In this chapter, he explains the gospel and what happens when you accept it. The chapter goes backwards through history as it begins with the effects of Christ’s victory, moves to how He won the victory, and then tells the story of why a victory was needed. Therefore, in order to fully understand what is going on, let’s start at verses 12-14 and work our way back to verse 1.

Read Romans 5:12-14

How would you define sin?

Here we see a world where sin and death reign, but, as this first verse suggests, it was not how things started. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we see God create a perfect and beautiful world out of nothing. Then we watch as Adam, the first man, decides to go his own way and rebel against God, thereby introducing sin and its consequence of death into this new world. All humans, as descendant of Adam, follow in this rebellion. We want to do things our way; as a result death passes to all of us. This was not what God intended.

Read Romans 5:6-11

What are some of the words used to describe us in this passage?

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As humans, we have rebelled, destroyed what God intended us to be, and separated ourselves from God. Here is where the good news comes in: while we rejected God, Christ died for us – the rebels, the ungodly. This whole passage shows the victory of Christ. God found a way, through the death of Christ, to satisfy the punishment that we brought upon ourselves. We can now be made right with God and given a clean slate.

In verse 9, we see the idea that we have been set right. In most translations, the word “justified” is used. This is a legal term for the formal acquittal of guilt by a judge. Imagine yourself on trial. You have committed a crime and the penalty is death. You could try to deny your guilt, but the truth is obvious to everyone. You are guilty as charged, when an innocent person comes, confesses to your crime and takes on your penalty of death, thereby satisfying your sentence and releasing you. This is the picture we are getting from the passage.

In another example, imagine yourself in debt – the Mafia loaned you money – and the time has come to settle your account. The problem is that you do not have the money you owe. You are in trouble, but then someone who cares for you decides to pay the debt on your behalf. You did not deserve for them to do this. At the end of the day, it should have been you who paid the debt, but it has been taken care of nevertheless. You have been justified. The only catch is you have to let this person take care of it. What if, in this scenario, the person had warned you not to take money from these guys, but you ignored him and left him for friends who supported your decision. Letting him help requires you to not only admit that you were wrong, but also return to a relationship you rejected. This is what Christians call repentance.

This is the gospel. You were condemned to die for the crime of rebelling against your Creator. But God would not leave you alone. Knowing that no one else could live the sinless life that was required, Christ came to earth to be the needed sacrifice and die in your place. Through his death, you were declared right before God. This is justification. However, for you to be saved, you have to allow Him to rescue you; stop trying to do life your way. Accepting His payment requires you to return to Him, repent, and die to the part of you that thought your way was best. It is not easy and some people will find it too humiliating and difficult. And yet, if you have been justified, your sin was taken care of and the wrath of God was appeased. Through Christ's death you have been forgiven.

Have you ever accepted the gospel and been “justified” by God as it's described in the paragraph above and in Romans 5?

Read Romans 5:1-5

In verse 2, most Bible translations state that through Christ we have “gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” Something has changed. You are no longer condemned.

You have been set free. With Christ as the key, you have been admitted into a new world where things work differently.

ACTION STEPS

Read these passages that communicate the gospel. Pray before you read, that God would speak to you through the Scriptures.

John 3:16-18

Ephesians 2:1-10

Colossians 1:21-22

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Ask yourself the following questions:

What seems unclear to you about the gospel?

What has been your personal experience with the gospel?

03

Transformation

*What does it really mean to live a new
life?*

Discuss:

When is a time in your life when you experienced significant change?

How did it change you as a person?

When have you observed transformation in someone else's life?

Romans 6:1-14

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

The last chapter talked about the gospel and how, by the death of Christ, you were cleared of your crimes. We ended with the idea that through His death you have been granted admission into a new state governed by grace, yet this is only a part of the gospel. Yes, you have been forgiven, but that is not enough. One who is forgiven receives a blank slate and yet, as humans, our nature is still to rebel. Reveling in our forgiven state, we might try to “behave” for a while, but in the end, our human nature will prevail. This is why forgiveness is not enough. We need a new nature. In Romans 5, Paul talks about the death of Christ. In Chapter 6, he reveals a second part to this gospel: Christ’s resurrection.

Read Romans 6:1-11

We died to ourselves when we returned to God and let Him justify us. Therefore, when Christ died, we died with Him. However, this was not the end of the plan. In 1 Corinthians, Paul stresses the gospel is that “Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again.” Christ was raised from the dead and through his resurrection we were brought to life. Paul argues that without Christ’s resurrection, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins. However, with the resurrection, we no longer belong to sin. In your returning to God, the old part of you that wants to rebel was put to death with Christ. In its place, God makes you a new creation with a new nature. This is why the resurrection is so integral to our faith. This is also why the way you live must change.

Read Romans 6:12-14

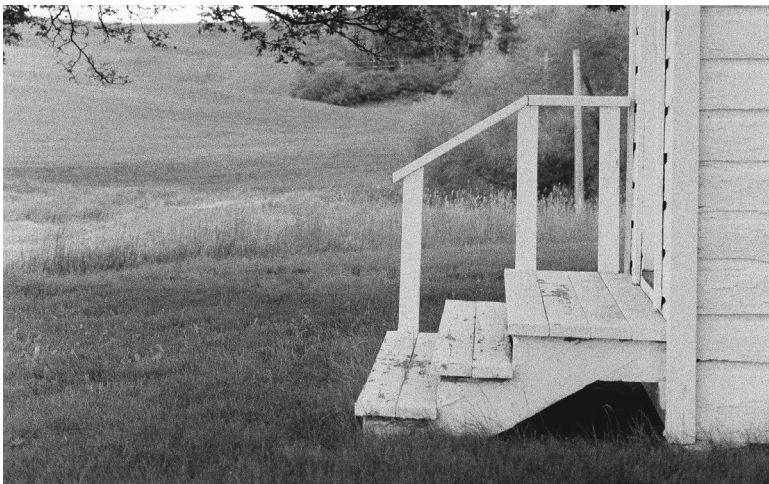
As you continue walking with God, the old rebellious you will try to return. The difference is you do not have to follow it; those traits no longer define you. In fact, they are contrary to your new nature. You have been reborn and given a new kind of life infused with the life of Christ. Now you have a choice to which nature you will obey: the old or the new. This process of rejecting and killing your old nature and becoming like Christ through your new nature is known as sanctification. With justification God does everything. In sanctification, we partner with God in bringing about change in our lives.

Understand, however, this is a process. You were reborn and, just like a newborn baby, you entered a new world where you will grow and learn. With time, you recognize who your parents are and begin to pick up their characteristics. You will make messes, but it is ok, because that is what babies do. Their messes do not change the relationship with their parents, just like your failings do not change your relationship with God. In your mistakes, there is grace. However, infancy is also a stage. Something is wrong if an infant fails to grow. The same growth is anticipated for you. Know that the whole sanctification process is saturated with the same grace found in the justification process.

There are some people who will accept Christ's death as a means to escape punishment, but will choose to live life as if nothing has changed. They fail to embrace the new life they have been given. It is as if they were corpses who were brought to life and yet chose to stay in their coffin. This is not what God intended when He saved us. John 1:12 says that "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." If you believe this, you can know that you are saved. With this new life, you have been adopted as a child of God. As such, God wants you to know Him, to experience His love and to be marked by the traits that characterize Him. There is life to be lived.

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It is important to note that while the gospel is the foundation of what we believe, it is not just something basic that we learn in the beginning, understand, and then move on from. We can never grow beyond the gospel. It is true that it is the story of how God saves us, but it is also what moves us forward in this journey. It's the power to save us and the power to change us.



ACTION STEPS

Take some time to read each of these verses. Write a brief statement of how each one speaks of your new nature and what you like about this truth:

Romans 8:14-17

Ephesians 1:3-14

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Ephesians 2:19

Colossians 1:13-14

The Father has the same view of us as He has of His Son since we are His adopted children. Is it difficult for you to believe that God takes pleasure in, is proud of, and delights in you? Why or Why Not?

Are there any ways you have noticed that God has made you new, or changed you, since your decision to follow Him? What are those things?

What are some ways that you have held onto your old life and continued to sin? What is God telling you to do about them?

You need to know that God is all in. He is committed to you and is not changing His mind. Read these verses and write down some notes of what they mean for you:

Romans 8:35-39

John 10:27-30

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John 6:37

1 Peter 1:3-5

Philippians 1:3-6

1 John 5:11-13

Copy all 10 of these passages onto a sheet of paper. (You can write them out or copy/paste them from BibleGateway.com). Print this out and read it every morning this week. Let these truths cement in your mind and remind you of your new identity in Christ.

04

Our Mission

What are we doing here?



Discuss:

What comes to mind when you think of “mission”?

From your understanding, what are Christians supposed to do?



John 20:19-21

¹⁹ *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*²⁰ *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

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²¹ *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

As you start your lifelong journey of following Jesus, there are some things we want you to know about the nature of your salvation. One of the most important aspects for you to understand from the start is the purpose of your salvation. To say it plainly: your salvation isn't supposed to end with you.

There's a real temptation to believe you were saved simply to go to heaven when you die, that your salvation is about you and maybe even just about making you more happy and comfortable. But that could not be further from the truth.

You were saved for the purpose of being sent. God wants to use you to reach others.

This is precisely because you were saved by Jesus, "The Sent One;" and now the natural progression is to live as a "Sent One" because you were saved by THE Sent One.

To give some biblical examples:

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In John chapter 4, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman where he reveals to her that she is a sinner and He is the Christ. In that moment she sees Jesus as the Savior and immediately runs into the city and tells everyone to come meet Jesus, the one who knows all. (John 4:1-42)

In Luke chapter 5, Jesus heals a paralyzed man and tells him His sins are forgiven. The man immediately gets up and praises God, and all who see him are amazed at God's goodness. (Luke 5:17-26)

In Luke Chapter 8, Jesus frees a demon possessed man. The man says he wants to join Jesus on his travels but Jesus sends him back to his home to tell about all that God has done for him. The man goes as a missionary to his hometown. (Luke 8:26-39)

In John chapter 9, Jesus gives sight to a blind man who immediately goes and testifies about the power and authority of Jesus. When he is questioned about the healing, he tells the religious leaders, “All I know is I was blind but now I see.” This man boldly tells others what he experienced, he believes in Jesus and he worships. (John 9:1-38)

In Luke chapter 19, Jesus has dinner with a tax collector named Zacchaeus who is so moved by Jesus that he declares he is going to give half of all his goods to the poor and pay back anyone he’s stolen from, four times what he took. (Luke 19:1-10)

Every story is the same. Jesus saves someone. The saved one becomes a sent one. They go to people they know and to strangers, they tell their story, they proclaim who Jesus is, they serve and sacrifice, and they worship.

This is precisely what we see in John 20:21 when Jesus says to his disciples after his resurrection, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

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The outworking of seeing ourselves as sent has led our church to become an urgent, multiplying, collegiate church planting movement. That direction comes from a theology more than it comes from a vision. It comes from a verse more than it comes from a voice. We believe God is a sending God, we are sent people, and our church is to keep on sending. We go because all Christians are called, through scripture, to go.

We encourage you to live into this truth and make serving, worshiping and sharing the gospel a habit of your life right away. Living sent isn’t something you do after you’ve been a Christian for a long time, and you don’t wait to be sent once you get every question about God answered. Live sent now. Join the mission today. Go this week to those who need to meet the Sent One.

ACTION STEPS

Who do you want to share the gospel with? Can you think of three people that you'd like to serve and tell about Jesus and your story?

Write out a prayer for those three people and a plan for when you will share with them.

If you feel the need, go ahead and read through the last 2 chapters of this book about Your Story and Missional Living. You'll find them very helpful in preparing to share the gospel.



05

Being a Disciple

What does it mean to follow Jesus?



Discuss:

*The word disciple simply means
'to be a follower or student of'.*

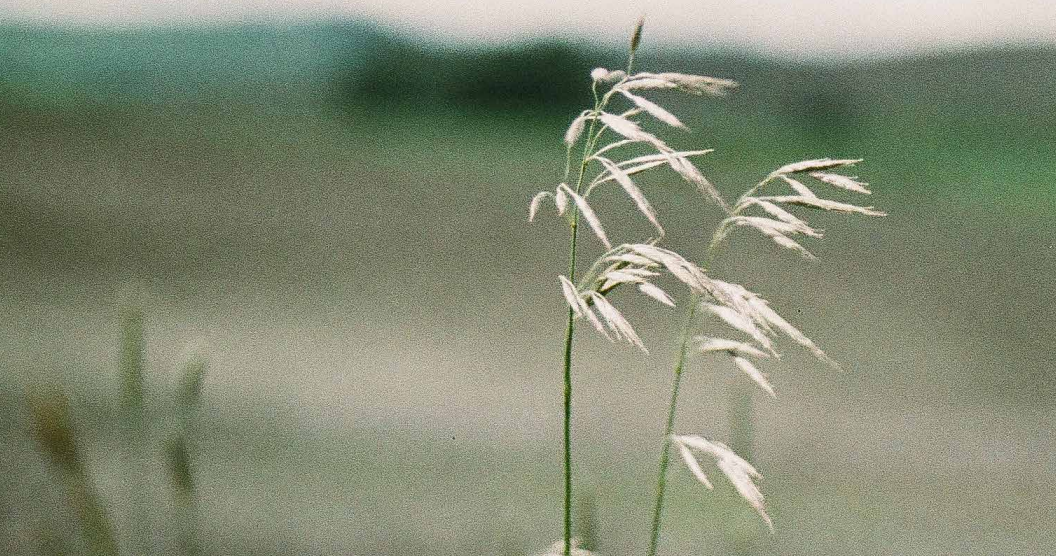
*What or who in your life would you say
you are or have been a disciple of?*

*What do you think it means
to be a disciple of Jesus?*

Psalm 139

¹ You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. ⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. ¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.



¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you. ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty! ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? ²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.



What does it mean to deny yourself and why does losing your life for Jesus actually save it?

As you pray this, what areas in your life are you hesitant to let God into? What are your reservations?

In light of these things, how do you feel about being a disciple of Jesus? You have heard the gospel and you have heard what it requires of you. Are you in?

Re-read Psalm 139:23-24

Verses 23 and 24 change the tone of the chapter to one of surrender. Most of the chapter delights in the love God has for His children. He created you in His image, knows the plan He has for you, and is always with you. These truths set the foundation that makes the vulnerability of the last two verses possible. David, the author of this Psalm, desires for God to search and try him because He is certain of God's character and love. Once we know God's character and love, we can trust Him to search us, try us, correct us, and lead us. When we know He is for us, we can confidently surrender ourselves and give Him the permission to change us as He sees fit. In the New Testament, we find Jesus asking for a similar attitude from His followers. At one point in His ministry, Jesus gathers His twelve most committed followers and lays out what He requires of them.

Read Luke 9:23-25

How does this passage impact your view of what it means to be a disciple?

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This is Christ's call to us as well. No one should think that serious faith is only for the select few nor that being a casual Christian – one who decides to accept Jesus but not follow him – is somehow acceptable. Christ made it clear that He wants your life. To deny yourself means denying your right to call the shots; exchanging your plans for where God leads. In the first century, master teachers took on students called disciples in order to teach them all the master knew. The disciple would memorize his teacher's words, imitate his life, and dedicate himself to furthering the master's teachings. Following his master became the disciple's life.

When Christ calls us to lay down our life, He wants us to give ourselves up to follow after Him. Literally, the picture He used is of us picking up a cross. A criminal only picked up his cross after receiving the death sentence. For all practical purposes, a criminal carrying his cross was a dead man. A dead man has abandoned all earthly hopes and ambitions. Similarly, Jesus is calling us to die to our self – our self-centered desires, self-seeking plans, and selfish ambitions. He wants you to be willing to give those things to Him. If we yield to Him, we can experience life as He intended us to experience it.

What is your reaction to this?

What Christ is asking of you is a difficult thing. It will involve taking up your cross and denying yourself daily. Never forget who it is you are letting search and lead you—a God who loves you, created you, knows you really, really well and wants what is best for you. This is the same attitude David had in Psalm 139, when he invited God to search and change him. Day after day, you will need to do the same. As daunting as this seems, Christ will not abandon you to do this on your own. He gives you the Bible to show you a glimpse of who He is, the Holy Spirit to guide and work inside of you, and a community of other believers to come alongside you as you grow.

ACTION STEPS

Memorize Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Here's some steps to help you memorize scripture:

1. Read it over and over; familiarize yourself with several read-throughs, in different translations even.
2. Write it repeatedly. Incorporating the act of writing helps tremendously in the memorization process. Write it on a note card where you can carry it and routinely review it or place it somewhere you will see it often (e.g. on a mirror, or in your car, put it in your back pocket).
3. Say it, quote it out loud, even tell it to a friend. Verbalizing helps cement it in your memory and helps you own the verse. When we memorize scripture we put it in our head and let God move it to our heart.



06

The Bible

What is the Bible and how do I read it?



Discuss:

Have you read the Bible before?

What do you believe about the Bible?

2 Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.



In Loving Memory
R. V. (Vic) Barnett
1918-2005

God wants us to get to know Him and build a close relationship with Him. From the beginning of history, God has been revealing Himself. Creation proclaims Him. Sunsets and starry nights render us speechless – pointing us to a creative and powerful God – and yet, despite their grandeur, they can't tell us who He is. Because He wants us to know Him, He gave us a book that reveals Himself – His character, His loves, His values, and His nature – to us His adopted children.

The book we received is an eclectic conglomeration of sorts – in it you find letters, historical records, legal documents, songs, laments, and stories of people. Uniquely popular, it has been translated into 2,333 languages – 10 times more than any other book. 44 million copies are sold every year.

Composed by God through more than 40 authors and collected by His people, it is a compilation of 66 books that were written over a period of 1,500 years and divided into the Old and New Testament.

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As we seek to grow in maturity as Christians, it is essential that we read the bible regularly. The Bible is the primary way God reveals Himself to us. These are His words. Time reading the Bible is time spent with God. Therefore, when you read it, you are literally connecting with God Himself. Paul says that the word of God is living and active. God wrote this book centuries ago, but God actually speaks through it today. In His vastness, He reveals new things through words you may have read a thousand times. Something you read a month ago might have completely new truth for you today. God can use it to encourage you in times of trouble, strengthen you when you feel weak, convict you when you sin, and remind you of His love when you forget. When you spend time with Him, it brings Him joy. It also changes you. Being with God transforms us. Picture two friends: the more they are together, the more they rub off on each other. They might start to wear the same clothes and use the same slang. Similarly, God wants to change us through our interaction with Him. Change is not achieved by our willpower. Transformed hearts are the work of God, but our being with Him is His means of transformation. We read the book to be with its author. We grow as we abide in Him.

Throughout history, Christians have interacted with the Bible through 5 general approaches: Reading, Meditation, Hearing, Memorization, and Study. We start with READING the Bible for ourselves to give us an overall picture of who God is and what He is doing. This is a time for you to personally come before God and be with Him through His word. As you read, ask questions about how the text relates to the original audience and then how it relates to your life. MEDITATION happens when you reflect and ponder over what you read. It's like when a cow "chews the cud." A cow's digestive system tries to get everything it can out of its food. To do so it chews and swallows. Then later, it literally brings the food back and chews it again. This allows the cow to get all of the nutrients available. Meditation is re-chewing the food. God wants you to take the Bible in and then reflect on His words and what they mean for your life, getting everything you can out of it. By mulling over these truths, we get more nutrients out of the word. HEARING then occurs when you seek out godly insight from another's understanding of Scripture. This happens when you listen to sermons or talk with peers about what God is teaching you. We gain knowledge and understanding when we discuss the word of God with other believers. MEMORIZATION stores these truths in your head so that God can use them and move them to your heart. Lastly, STUDY deepens your understanding of what the Bible is saying and provides you with a framework for what you believe.

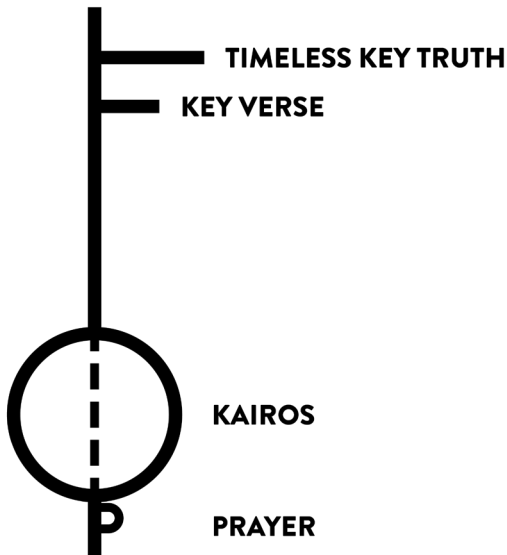
Together, these approaches teach us the character and story of God. As we learn, we will grow and change. Remember, however, these activities alone do not produce change. Treating them like a to-do list misses the point. Their job is to bring you to the place where change can occur—the deep intimacy of a relationship with God.

THE KEY

Journaling is an important part of your time in the scripture. We can engage all 5 ways of interacting with the Bible through journaling. God teaches us through His word and we grow spiritually by spending time in the word. You can see yourself grow spiritually in the same way you can see yourself grow physically. When you were a kid your mom or dad would put you against the wall and with a ruler, put a pencil mark on the wall. Why? So that six months to a year later, as you stood against that same wall with the same ruler, you could hopefully put a new mark on the wall and see and celebrate growth. In the same way. A journal acts as a wall and ruler so that you can look back and see what God has walked you through, how He has answered your prayers, and how you have grown spiritually.

This life shape is a helpful “key” to help you unlock what it is that God is trying to say to you during your time reading the bible.

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Start off by writing the date and the scripture that you are reading at the top of your journal page. This acts as a reference point when you look back at your journal. It also acts as a source of accountability. Sometimes we think it's only been a day or two since we spent time in the scriptures but when we look at our journal we notice that it's actually been 3 weeks.

KEY THOUGHT:

Read the passage for the day a couple of times. Pray for insight as you meditate on what the passage says. Think and study what it meant to the original audience. In one or two sentences, write what you see is the key thought of the passages that you read. Use your own words, imagine summing up what you just read to someone who has never read the Bible.

KEY VERSE:

Write down the one or two verses, word for word, that grabbed your attention or sums up the passage you just read. This does two things; it helps you meditate on and put those verses to memory.

KAIROS:

Every time we spend time in God's word we should have a kairos moment. However, there will be times where we hear His voice much louder than others.

Repent: Write down in a sentence, what is God saying to me?

Believe: Write down in a sentence, what am I going to do in response to what God has told me?

PRAYER:

Surprisingly the goal of spending time in God's Word is not to simply read the scripture but to pray the scripture. Based upon the text and what God has spoken to you, write out a prayer to God, like a letter to Him. You could ask Him for wisdom, courage to follow through with what He has asked of you, seek forgiveness for times that you haven't been obedient or simply pray through the scripture.

If you want to put this into action right now and you're wondering what to read, here are some great suggestions to get you started:

John 15; Joshua 1; Mark 8; 1 Peter 1

07

Holy Spirit

How do I do what God wants me to do?



Discuss:

*Have you ever heard someone say,
“God told me to...”,
“I just feel like God is saying...”?*

If yes, how did it make you feel?

*What/who do you think
the Holy Spirit is?*

Before Christ left, He commanded His followers to go into the world and turn it upside down through His truth. The disciples had been prepared, taught, trained, and commissioned for this task and yet, after Christ's death, we find them cowering in locked rooms (John 20:19). These disciples did not seem ready to take God's mission to the world. Nevertheless, Jesus wanted to use them to advance His kingdom. He called them to spread His gospel, knowing that He was giving them an impossible task that only God could accomplish.

Read Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, Ephesians 3:14-20 and John 16:7-14

In Acts, we see the event of God moving into man and the power that He brings. In Ephesians, we see Paul praying that God's people be filled with the power of the Spirit. Lastly, in John, we see Jesus casting the vision of why He's sending the Spirit, not as a consolation prize, but as a strategic and necessary part of the furthering of His plan.

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Jesus knew that people could not carry out His mission on their own. They needed help or specifically a Helper. The size of the mission required someone who could go with people wherever they went. The assignment demanded someone who could not only be present with people, but who could also work in and through them. Jesus knew that it was better for him to "go," because then he could send the Holy Spirit, who would live inside of them, continually be with them and empower them to take His love to the world. He knew that, through the Spirit, God would make His home in people. The Spirit intends to continue the work Christ stated: He leads us to "all truth," teaches us how to continually follow Christ, guides us to deeper intimacy with God, produces God's character in us, and gives us the ability to live out our new life. He helps us in our weaknesses, comforts us in trouble, reveals God to us in our ignorance, and convicts us of our sin. He also empowers us to be God's representatives on earth and enables us to uplift Christ and serve others.

When Christ left, He knew our need. He didn't intend for us to follow Him on our own. That is why this is so beautiful. Where with Jesus, the disciples had a companion, we have someone even closer. In Jesus, God dwelt with the disciples. With the Spirit, God dwells in His disciples. You have the spirit of the living God inside of you. If you have accepted Christ, you are not just a person living your life by human power. God wants to give you His strength to live in, His power to display, and His wisdom to help you make Him known.

How do you feel about God living inside of you?

Note that while a part of the Spirit's role is to be our Comforter and Guide, His main purpose is to lift up Christ. Often we desire power in order that we might be applauded or have control, but we can't approach the Spirit that way. We can't attempt to use Him for our purposes. Sometimes we try to direct Him when He was given to direct us. He's not a passive power to manipulate. He is God. Desiring the Holy Spirit means we submit to Him and allow Him to guide us, not the other way around. We're called to be led by Him, which can be somewhat daunting. He might ask you to talk to strangers, to move across the country, or to give up things you treasure. An easy life is not guaranteed. We do not know where He might take us. We do know, however, that He will call us to live intentionally wherever we are - interacting with others and seeing them as people to whom God wants to reveal Himself. When you follow the Spirit, you will find that He wants to use you. He doesn't intend for you to settle in and get comfortable. If you are alive, it's because He still has something He wants to do in and through you.

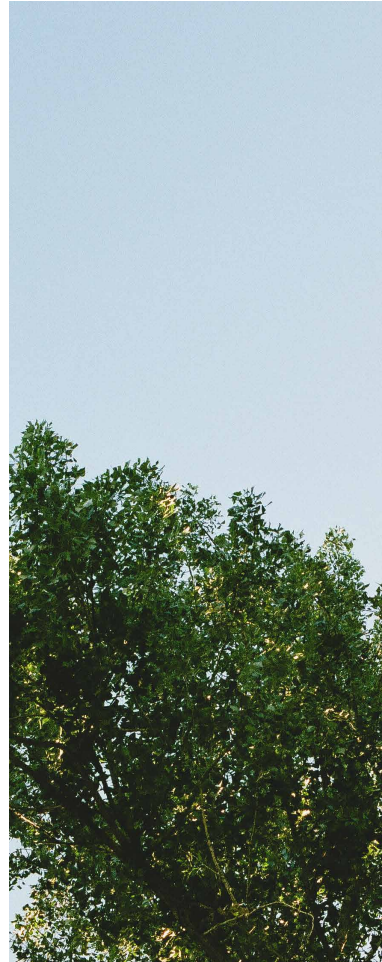
Are you open to God using you? How do you find yourself trying to use or manipulate God?

Read Galatians 5:16-25

As believers, we are commanded to walk in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit requires a daily reliance on God. This entails habitual, continual and active interaction. Throughout the day, you have a choice of how you will go through life. When trouble comes, who do you turn to? When you need advice, who do you ask first: your roommate, your family, your best friend? God wants us to turn to Him when we need wisdom, confidence, companionship, strength, someone to talk to, someone to vent to. When you plan your day, go to Him. Ask Him how He wants you to spend your time. When you want to sin, run to Him. You cannot walk in the Spirit and sin at the same time. That's not to say you lose the Spirit if you do sin. You are His permanent residence. That won't change. However, when you sin, you are not actively submitting to His presence in your life. Therefore, run to Him and you will not sin. When you do ignore Him and sin, the Spirit convicts you. You will then have to choose to submit and repent or continue disregarding His voice. As you can see, walking with the Spirit is continual. God wants to go through our everyday life with us. If we let Him, beautiful things happen. He shapes us and our lives start to look different. As we submit to Him, His traits grow in us. We become patient, loving, kind, joyful, and gentle because the Spirit is guiding us and those are the attributes that characterize Him. As we begin to reflect Him, He uses us to affect our surroundings. Ultimately, He makes us look like Christ so that the world might then see Christ.

God wants to change the world through us. We are the tools He intends to use to make His mission happen. He wants to use us and He wants to empower us, but we have to walk in Him.

He lives in us perpetually, but we have to pursue His presence and listen to His guidance. The world desperately needs to be touched by the love of our God. He lives in you so that the world might see Him. He wants to change you if you'll let Him and then He wants to use you to bring His love to others. This is the mission to which Christ followers are called. It is also what necessitates the work, power, and guidance of the Spirit in our lives. We can't do this on our own and we are not supposed to. God's plan is to move through us by changing us and empowering us to do what would be otherwise impossible.





ACTION STEPS

This week, practice walking in the Spirit. Write down here or in a journal what the Spirit says to you and where He leads you.

Start your day by thinking through your schedule and activities for the day. Ask the Spirit to lead you as you go and do. Later, write down how you saw the Spirit working in your day.

Ask God to show you how He sees the people around you. Write down what you see and record some new ways you can serve and connect with the people in your life.

Ask Him to make you aware of your surroundings, to see what He sees. What are the needs in your neighborhood/dorm/apartment building or where you spend your time? How does God want to use you there? What can you do?

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Allow the Spirit to guide your words. How does God want to use you this week to speak to someone else: words of encouragement, reminders of truth, the good news of Jesus. Ask God what He wants you to say, and then say it.

08

Prayer

How do I talk to God?



Discuss:

What comes to mind when you think about prayer?

Have you ever prayed? If so, what was that experience like?



As a Father, God longs for His Children to come to Him. He intends for you to live with Him and desire to be near Him. Prayer – which literally means talking with God – draws us into that relationship. When you asked Him to search your heart, you prayed. You asked God to show you how He sees people: This was a prayer as well. It is through prayer that we communicate with God. Prayer takes many forms: it can be a word of thanks or a time of worship, a cry of desperation or a request for guidance.

Like any conversation, prayer requires both talking and listening. Sometimes, it looks like you pouring out your heart to your Father; other times, it might entail quieting your heart and listening for His voice. In whatever form, it is the main means by which we come to God. The book of Hebrews paints a picture of what prayer literally looks like:

“Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...let us... then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

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When we pray, it is as if we are entering into the throne room of a great king. We have no right to come before Him on our own and yet, we are beckoned to come. Our access into this throne room is through Jesus. Because Christ justified us through His death, God now sees us based on Christ’s righteousness and not based on our own sin or merit. As a result, we are given free access to the throne room as a child of the King.

Read Matthew 6:5-13; Read Luke 11:1-4

In these passages, we find Jesus teaching His disciples about prayer. At first, prayer seems mysterious and intimidating. How do you approach a Being who is both your Father and your Creator, your Friend and your King? In our uncertainty, we sometimes avoid prayer, leaving it to the “experts” or thinking that we somehow need to be better before we come to God. Jesus makes it clear that prayer is not a show or about getting other people’s attention. When asked how to pray, Jesus started by using the

word Father. By starting here, Christ establishes the attitude with which we should approach God—like an unassuming child going before a loving dad. A child doesn't worry about whether his dad wants him there or if he is asking too much or too little. A child goes to his dad assuming that his father loves him and wants to be near to him. Christ beckons us to come as we are and pour out our hearts.

After establishing Him as Father, Christ reminds us of who our Father is: “who is in Heaven, Hallowed be your name.” While He is our Father, we have to remember that He is also God. Hallowed means to honor as holy. He is not like us. We are on earth; He is in heaven. Sometimes we will ask Him for things we think are necessary for our livelihood. As our Father and Creator, He might disagree. This doesn't negate His desire for us to ask Him anyway. When we recognize Him as God, we realize He is ultimate and we are not. This shapes what we ask for and enables us to ask the next part of this prayer: “your kingdom come.” At the end of the day, we are here to further His kingdom. We should be seeking to ask in line with what God wants for us and our world. Worshiping God for who He is reorients our hearts toward His purposes and changes our perspective on what we want for ourselves.

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Read Luke 11:5-13

Jesus affirms the picture in Hebrews of approaching God in prayer with confidence, audacity even. He seems to say that we should keep asking almost to the point of being annoying. God wants us to ask Him for anything. He tells us to ask, seek, and knock. He wants us to make requests of Him. He wants us to go to Him when we have needs and He wants us to ask Him to take care of us. In a relationship with Him, our asking can be a form of worship for it shows that we need Him, that we are incapable of functioning without Him and that we trust in His provision. Sometimes we might be tempted to shift our focus from having a relationship to getting what we want. Know that He wants to give us good things, but He wants us to seek Him and not the gifts He might give. He might not give us exactly what we ask, but when God is our focus we can trust that He knows what is best.

As we journey with Him in prayer, He transforms us and aligns our desires with His own. He teaches us how to pray and guides us on what to ask Him for. The more we pray, the more we will trust our Father. The more we trust Him, the closer we come to Him, and the more we will start to look like Him. As a result, prayer is a central part of walking with God. You can't expect to have a good relationship with someone if you do not spend time with them, talk with them, or listen to what they have to say. A relationship cannot survive without communication. The same principles apply to your relationship with God. Pour your heart out to Him, and leave room to listen to His quiet voice. In John 10, Jesus likens us to sheep who know and listen to their shepherd's voice: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me." You must actively talk to Him and you must actively listen to Him.

Practically, there are many methods of prayer. We praise God for who He is (adoration), thank Him for what He has done (thanksgiving), and come clean and ask for His forgiveness when we sin (confession). We also look to God for help with our needs (petition) or ask Him requests on behalf of the people around us (intercession). As we walk with God, our prayers change and grow. Don't get wrapped up in "praying rightly", but simply recognize who God is and then just talk to Him. If you get discouraged, keep trying. God sent His Son so that you could come before Him. Christ died so that you may be brought to God. The Bible specifically teaches us how to pray. The Holy Spirit was given to live in you and help you in your weaknesses. When you don't know how to pray, make that a prayer.

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The book of Romans promises that the Spirit Himself speaks for you when you don't have the words to say. While you make intercession for others, the Spirit of God intercedes for you. There is no excuse for prayerlessness. God wants you to enter His presence and He has taken away every obstacle that might prevent your coming. Go to Him. The single best way to learn about prayer is to start praying.

ACTION STEPS

For the next 5 days, devote each day to a different aspect of prayer. All of these types of prayer are an essential part of your relationship with God:

Day One:

Start by spending today praising God for who He is. Go for a walk. As you walk around, revel in God as Creator. Pay attention to the plants and animals you see and take time to enjoy them. Download the hymn How Great thou Art and pray the lyrics as you sing. Lastly, read Psalm 145 aloud to God.

Day Two:

In Greek, confess means to agree with. In confessing, you are agreeing with God where you have sinned, repenting of that sin, and letting Him clean you of that sin. Today, read Psalm 51 as a prayer. Think about your life and confess to God the areas where you have sinned this week. Trust that if you confess your sins, He will forgive you and cleanse you (1 John 1:9).

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Day Three:

We have been given more than we can ever know. Today, make a list of all the good things you have in your life. Try to continually be thankful all day today. Write out a prayer of things that you have to be thankful for.

Day Four:

Pray for the people God has put in your life. God wants us to bring the needs of other people before Him as well. As you go about your day, pray for the people you see. Pray that God would reveal Himself to them somehow during the day and that they could become aware of His love for them. Ask your family and friends how they are doing and if they have anything they would like you to pray for.

Day Five:

Today, ask for yourself. Ask God as a Father who loves you and wants to surprise you with His goodness. Ask with annoying audacity. Pray that your desires would line up with what God wants for you.



09

Sin

If I'm a new person in Christ, why do I still struggle with my old junk?



Discuss:

*What comes to mind when you
hear the word sin?*

How do you think God sees your sin?

As we learn to walk with God, we need to be reminded of a few things. When Christ died for us, He took our sins upon Himself and made us clean in God's sight. We were made a new creation and moved from death to life, darkness to light. Despite this reality, we still struggle with sin. Though we have been brought to the light, we live in a world covered by darkness and that can make daily life difficult. Your old way of life will draw and entice you. Even though you are a new creature, opportunities to sin will still abound. Sadly, there will be times where you give into that sin. In light of this, there are a few more truths we need to grasp.

When we received Christ, sin lost its power over us. Once enslaved to it, we have now been set free. Yet, despite our freedom, our old life still strangely allures us. Paul describes this disturbing reality in Romans 7:15-25.

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Romans 7:15-25

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

As Christians, Christ lives in us, but so do our old desires. The Spirit indwells us enabling us to kill our old self and walk in our new reality. However, the old you does not want to die and will fight your attempts to kill it. This is the struggle Paul laments. By choosing Christ, you are waging war against your former self and the kingdom of darkness you used to call home. While this battle will at times be difficult, we are fighting a war that has already been won. We are Christ's and He has conquered sin and death. No longer enslaved, these battles are now merely a part of the process of us becoming more like Christ and our joining His mission to reach our world.

In light of this overarching victory, we try to diminish the gravity of the sin in our lives. In the end, you make the choice to sin - no matter how you try to rationalize it or cover it up. Sin is a big deal: you are betraying the God who bought you with His blood. When you choose sin, it grieves God's Spirit inside of you for sin deeply matters to God. God hates sin. To sin is to run back to the chains that He died to set you free from. It is you choosing another—the god of self, security, approval, pleasure—over your loving Father who wants what is best for His child. Sometimes the choice to do things God's way entails pushing away seemingly “better” or more desirable things. However, God knows you and knows that those other things you desire are not beneficial to you. In fact, your pursuit of those sinful desires is akin to you dabbling with things that reek of death. You have been given life; playing with dead things at this point is gross and kind of disturbing.

In another picture, there's a phenomenon that happens on beaches that causes over 100 drownings every year in the United States. Under certain conditions, a powerful rip current is created near the shore that is able to pull people under a wave and carry them into deep water. One minute you're wading along peacefully in the surf, the next you're being dragged out to sea. Since the surface of the water often has a calmer appearance, you probably won't even notice a rip current until you're right in the middle of it. Like these currents, sin can seem innocent and harmless on the surface. God, however, knows the ultimate outcome of these sinful desires: the sin that at first seems harmless will eventually overtake you. Before you know it, you are dangerously miles away from where you want to be.

If we pursue sin, the Holy Spirit will convict us. In that moment, we can choose to ignore Him or submit to Him. If we choose to ignore Him, we hinder our relationship with Him. Remember, this doesn't affect our salvation. We were bought by the blood of Christ. Sin, however, does affect our walk with God. If you are continually choosing to live apart from what God desires for you, your relationship with Him will become distanced. As sin numbs you, your purpose and focus will change. You'll begin to care less and less about the things of God, and self will once again take the center stage.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

Fortunately, God knows our struggles. Hebrews says that Christ was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. When Christ gave us new life, He infused us with the power to defeat the temptations of our former nature. This verse in 1 Corinthians promises that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to handle. Temptations will still come, but we no longer have to yield to them. The Holy Spirit now lives inside of us – giving us strength to resist temptation when it rears its ugly head. Next time you are tempted, ask God for strength. He promised to provide a way of escape. Defeat does not have to be our fate. That being said, if we choose not to take the way out, all is not lost. Even in our biggest sins, God's grace remains. If anything, our failure reminds us of our need for the gospel.

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Read 1 John 1:5- 2:2, Proverbs 28:13

In 1 John, we see the promise that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us of them. His grace is limitless and His love is never ending. However, in order to experience this forgiveness, we have to bring our sins to Him. When we sin, returning to God might be the last thing we want to do. We might instead feel the desire to distance ourselves from God until we clean up our act. Alternatively, we might try to pretend nothing is wrong in order to cover up our sin. We sin and then try to hide and conceal our disobedience.

Adam and Eve did this when they committed the first sin ever. We do this today. The problem with this is that it fixes nothing. Until we face our sin, our relationship with God cannot move forward. God knows when we sin and He has already given us grace.

Christ died for the sins you committed in the past, are committing currently, and will commit in the future. However, we can't experience this grace until we confront our sins and return to our relationship with Him. God desires us to bring our sin into the light, own where we failed, and return to His love. If you confess your sins, know that you are forgiven and that your sins have been removed "as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12)." Through Christ, they are remembered no more.

ACTION STEPS:

Read Genesis 3:1-13 and Genesis 4:1-10

These two passages give the stories of some of the first sins ever committed. As you read them, pay attention to two things:

1. How does God react and relate to the humans following their sin?
2. What is the human's initial response to God following their sin?

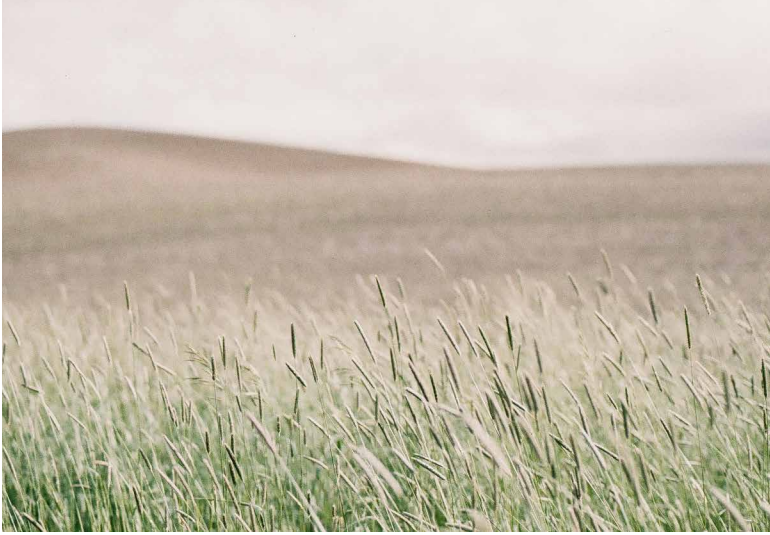
Now ask yourself, how do you relate to Adam and Eve and Cain in how you respond to God when you sin?

Write out how you are most prone to sin. Where are you most tempted?

Reflect on situations where you were tempted: Where did God provide a way out?

Answer for yourself, "Why is sin a bad thing?"

Sometimes we feel trapped by sin and debilitated by shame. What does the gospel say about this?



Write out your sins on a separate piece of paper. Allow this to be a time of confession to God. Now, look up 1 John 1:9 and write this verse over your sins; Reflect over the forgiveness the verse offers and then tear up the piece of paper. Know that your sins are remembered no more and God is working to change your heart and your desires.



10

Community

Why do we need the Church?



Discuss:

*Who do you consider to be
your community?*

*What role does community
play in your life?*

In the Western world, we live in a culture where individualism reigns. We are told to be who we are, do what makes us happy and let no one tell us otherwise. In fact, the ability to make it on our own is one of the primary indicators of our arrival in adulthood. Urged to strive for autonomy and self-reliance, we are led to believe that we reach our pinnacle by achieving complete independence and self expression. As a result, we strive to be fully self-sufficient and dependent solely upon ourselves. The problem is this is never fully attainable or even fully desirable. As humans, whether we admit it or not, we have a deep need for interaction with other people. Interestingly, when we look at Scripture we see that this need for community not only exists but, according to Genesis, is good. Our need for community is, in fact, integrated within the very fabric of our nature as humans.

How have you experienced the push from culture and society to seek independence from everyone else?

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Have you seen this to be a positive or negative thing and how so?

According to Genesis 1:26, we are made in the image of God. However, if you read these verses, you'll notice the language used indicates plurality: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." We are made in the image of a God who, by His nature, exists within relationship. We serve a God who is one and yet somehow three: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully separate and yet fully connected and engaged in eternal community. This truth - known as the Trinity - illuminates and validates our deep need for other people. Just as God lives in community, He also intends for us to live life together - as a group of people continually encouraging each other, loving each other, and pouring our lives into one another. People might be able to

survive disconnected from community, but they will never thrive. When we try to live individually and independently, we are in direct violation of how God created us.

God intends for us to serve individually, but also within community. He intends for us to pursue Him privately, but also while rubbing shoulders with one another. In order to succeed in our walk with Christ, we have to deeply involve others in our lives. Community is one of the primary means through which we are matured, kept accountable, encouraged and grown. To neglect this is to waste one of the greatest tools God has given us. We typically believe that our sin and struggles are between us and God. We keep community at arm's length, allowing only surface level relationships so we can maintain the appearance of perfection. On the contrary, in James 5:16, we are instructed to: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other, so that you may be healed." As Will Walker states:

The suggestion that my sin is best dealt with between me and God is problematic. This point of view sees community as nonessential to sanctification. It treats the Body of Christ as a gathering of the healed, not a fellowship of the broken. It suggests that sin can be conquered by introspection and personal struggle. These notions are not biblical...To say, It's my sin; I need to deal with it," is to suggest that God will give me the end (victory over sin) apart from the means (gospel-centered community)."

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Community as it was intended is a powerful thing. This community is made up of the people who will fight with you in your struggles and will come alongside you when you fall. They'll also remind you of God's grace in your sin and lovingly push you toward Christ. Community is not an option; it's an essential factor in our ability to live the Christian life well. In forgoing it, we miss out on the support, richness, and healing that comes with living life together. As Christians, we are surrounded by a community of people who are walking ahead of us and with us - people who have been where we are now, dealt with similar struggles and encountered innumerable victories and failures. When temptation to sin threatens to overwhelm us, we have people in our corner raring to help us fight. If sin starts to entangle us and numb us, we have people who can call us out and remind us of God's love and mercy.

How do you see yourself avoiding community and not letting others be a part of your life?

Community, however, also takes work. It requires us to let people into the places that we'd rather hide. It also forces us to give up our pride and self-reliance. It's humbling to admit we can't do life on our own and willingly put ourselves in a less than favorable light. It also entails you pouring your life into others. Just as people come alongside you, God asks you to reciprocate. Community is a two-sided endeavor. Setting your desires aside, you are to honor fellow Christians above yourselves (Romans 12:10). Living in community is a lesson in selflessness, humility, forgiveness, and continual love even when the other party does not deserve it. This is a part of living in light of God's mercy and grace. We do not deserve His forgiveness and love, but He gives it anyway. As His children, we are asked to do the same.

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Read John 13:34-35, Phil 2:1-8, 1 John 4:11-12

Our love for each other is powered and modeled in Christ and, as a result, should set us apart. Anything patterned after God's love will naturally be distinctive. God's love is unconditional and sacrificial—even to the point of death. Christ is our example and we are to imitate His love so that the world might see our Savior. As 1 John says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us." God uses us and our love for one another to reveal Christ's love to the world. As Christians, we cannot afford to neglect community.

ACTION STEPS

Take an inventory of the people in your life. Who are the other Jesus Followers that God has placed there that you need to develop a deeper relationship with?

Begin praying that God will help you connect with them and develop spiritual relationships with them.

List a couple of ways you can better love your roommates or close friends? How can you be more involved in your village? How can you be more involved in Resonate in general?

Choose to encourage someone different everyday this week. Be creative. (Examples: write a letter, send a text, leave a sticky note in a place they'll find it, make cookies and deliver them, etc.)

11

Your Story

*How do I talk to my friends and family
about my new life?*



Discuss:

What have conversations with others about your faith looked like in the past?

What seems most intimidating when it comes to sharing your story?

Psalm 107

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. ² Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, ³ those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. ⁴ Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. ⁵ They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.

⁶ Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. ⁸ Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, ⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. ¹⁰ Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains, ¹¹ because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High.

¹² So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help. ¹³ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. ¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains. ¹⁵ Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, ¹⁶ for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron. ¹⁷ Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. ¹⁸ They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.

¹⁹ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. ²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. ²¹ Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. ²² Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy. ²³ Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. ²⁴ They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep.

²⁵ For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. ²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. ²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end. ²⁸ Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. ²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰ They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.

³¹ Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. ³² Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. ³³ He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, ³⁴ and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. ³⁵ He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; ³⁶ there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle.

³⁷ They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; ³⁸ he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish. ³⁹ Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; ⁴⁰ he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste.

⁴¹ But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. ⁴² The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. ⁴³ Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.

Throughout this Psalm, we see God rescuing people – from darkness, from sin, from wandering and from themselves. Like them, we were all rescued from something, and like them, we all have stories to tell.

Chances are if you look back over your life, you will see the orchestration of God. You might point to the time when you started to search for something of meaning or the moment you first experienced God. Then there was the day you were captivated by the love of God and chose to give Him control. While these might seem to be isolated events, they are all connected and contribute to the larger story of God’s redemption in your life.

As we think about our lives as a story, we begin to see His work in our lives. We are the redeemed. Just as He did for the people in Psalm 107, God has saved us and brought us out of our former life. But His work doesn’t stop there. He saved us, but He also wants us to tell our story. Psalm 107:2 says, “Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story.” Our individual stories weren’t written to be kept to ourselves. Stories are written to be told, and God wants to use our stories to draw people to the even larger story of the Gospel.

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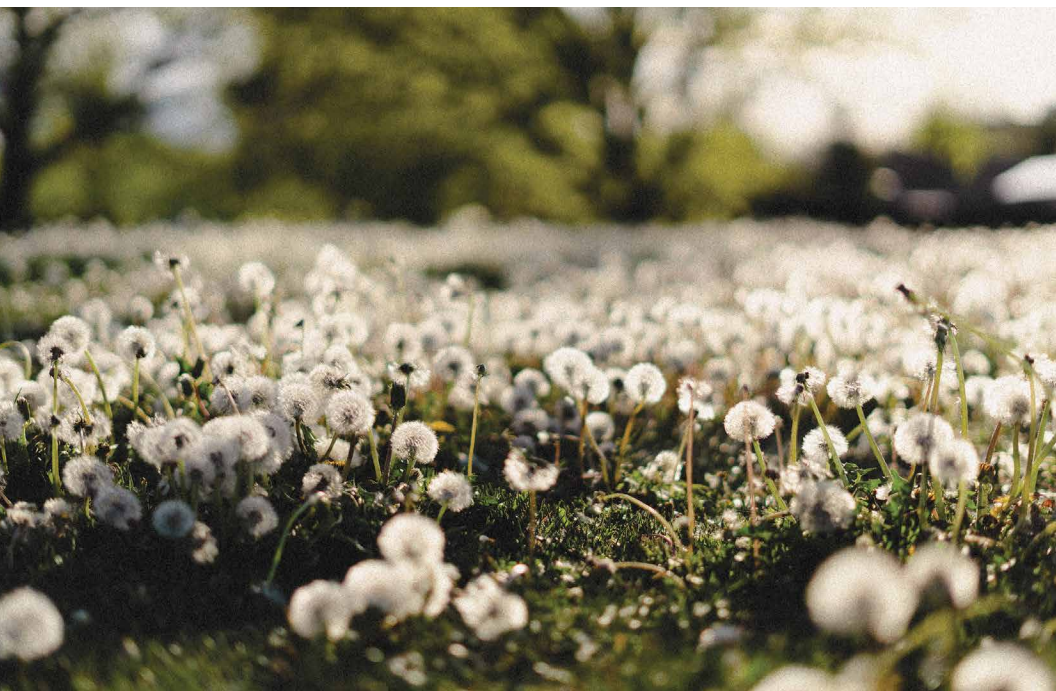
As a follower of Christ, you are brought into a story bigger than your life. The Bible tells the story of a broken world and its Creator’s mission to redeem and restore it. In the New Testament, we see God becoming man and dying for our reconciliation. God then gave His followers the job of applying the redemption Christ provided for us. With this job, we have a new identity and purpose.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

This passage details our new focus. 2 Corinthians 5:20 appoints us as the ambassadors of Christ. An ambassador is a person who is sent by their native country as its official representative to a foreign nation. Their post affects every area of their life from where they live to what they eat and drink. They are identified by their nation of origin and their every action reflects on their homeland.

As ambassadors of Christ, we have a mission that requires our lives. God wants to tell His story through us. Just as the ambassador's actions reflect on his country, our actions reflect on Christ. We don't have the option of compartmentalizing our faith. God is as much a part of our Thursday as He is our Sunday. Acting right however is not the ambassador's sole job. He must speak. While his actions affect how his words are received, He was sent to speak on behalf of his country. In the same way, God makes His appeal to our world through us. We are his mouthpiece to our world.

As one who has been redeemed, you have a story to tell. As an ambassador of Christ, your job is to tell that story—through your actions and through your conversations. Let us learn our stories well and train our minds to see them in light of the Gospel so that God can use us to reveal His glory.



ACTION STEPS

Write out the story of your life as a timeline of events.

Now write out your story connecting it to the gospel. The hope is not for you to be able to give more information about yourself, but for you to tell a story where God is the hero of your life. To help you with this, here's a useful tool. These questions will help you see Christ in the stages of your life:

What was your life like Before Jesus?

What did you chase after? What was your identity built on?

Why Jesus?

How did you come to a realization that there was something more? What clicked?

What has your life been like Since Jesus?
How are you becoming a new creation? What events in your life
has He used to deepen your understanding of Himself?

Finally, moving forward, where are you Following Jesus?
What are your passions? What stirs you? What causes you angst?
How can you dream of living a story oriented around bringing
glory to God and proclaiming His story?

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Using what you've written, tell your story to another Christian.
Then tell your story to someone you know that is not a Christian.



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Missional Living

What is my new purpose on earth?



Discuss:

What do you think your purpose is?

*How do you feel about living on mission
and sharing your faith with others?*

2 Corinthians 5:16-19

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.



Since we can no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view, we are always on mission. Always. This means there are people in your life waiting to hear more about Jesus. How do we get into those relationships and into those conversations? The Missional Living Wheel breaks down every relational and conversational barrier that typically stands in the way of people sharing the Good News.

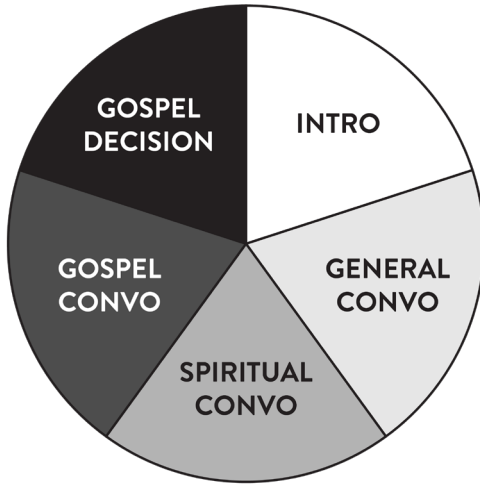
Before Jesus went back to heaven, he looked at his followers and said, “Go into all the world and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20). For his followers then and now, this is a clear command. This is what followers of Jesus do and there is no getting around it. We are called to tell people what He has done. We are called to look different because he has made us different. We can no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view, but we are tasked with seeing them as Jesus does – people who desperately need the ministry of reconciliation as much as we do.

Tim Chester, author of Total Church, writes:

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“We have a tendency to promote a kind of evangelism that is without proclamation. Acts of good service are done or we just invite people to our events or to experience church with us. Without words, these are pointless because they only point back to our good works. God is at the center of the gospel word. Oftentimes evangelism can place us in that position. The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was that a savior came to seek and save the lost, not just meet your needs and make you feel good.”

THE MISSIONAL LIVING WHEEL



STAGE 1: INTRO TO CONVERSATIONS

Stage one is getting out of the Christian bubble. Your neighbor, your local barista, the people at your gym, workplace, class, and neighborhood are within your sphere of influence. Before you can share the gospel with them, you have to introduce yourself and learn their name.

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Every day you choose to see people one of three ways:

1. Scenery: whooshing past people, barely acknowledging their presence.
2. Machinery: treating people like they are just there to perform a task for you. This could be your mechanic, your barista, your mailman, your professor.
3. Ministry: God's sons and daughters, desperate for the ministry of reconciliation to himself.

Have you been treating people in your life as scenery, machinery, or ministry?

Who is someone you need to break past the intro barrier with and finally introduce yourself to?

STAGE 2: GENERAL CONVERSATION

Stage 2 is about building relationships. God wants you to care for the people in your life who don't know Jesus. Have ears to hear where they are hurting and eyes to see how you and your Christian community can come around them and serve them tangibly. Introduce your Christian community to them. Find ways to hangout in a context different from the one in which you know each other (move beyond the classroom, workplace, coffee shop). Ask questions that uncover needs and listen for areas that you can see a need for a Savior. Remember the things they share with you and follow up often with questions. Really, this stage is about being a good friend in a world where trust and relationships have been trampled on.

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Who are you going to have General Conversations with?

Where is God asking you to step out and serve the needs of someone around you?

STAGE 3: SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

Stage 3 is about the spiritual journey everyone is on. An atheist is on a spiritual journey – he is rejecting the idea of a God, and that is a spiritual thing. Someone who grew up in the church is on a spiritual journey, and we must not assume they have already arrived at Jesus as their destination. Ask what they believe about the world, ask why they believe that, ask every question you can think of. It is not weird to break this conversation barrier! Listen to what they believe, people love to talk about what they think about the world and why. Wait for the Spirit to open doors for you to share what you believe with them. Let us not be afraid of the awkward and miss out on being a part of God moving in their life. You may be one of the few people to ask them what they think about God, heaven, the meaning of life.

Are there people in your life who you know most everything about except what they think about spirituality?

Who is God asking you to have a spiritual conversation with?

STAGE 4: GOSPEL CONVERSATION

Stage 4 is about boldness and proclaiming the truth. As we learn in the Gospel, we were dead in our sin and we have been brought to life in Jesus. At some point, this must be told. Your faith cannot just sit as one of your many hobbies or interests portrayed to your friends. We have been made alive and Jesus commands us to go and tell others. In one of the conversation stages up until this point, there will be a moment where you are asked a question back or where you are invited to speak. Trust God as you break past this barrier. Pray for those moments. Speak boldly and pray for receptive hearts.

Who is God asking you to have a Gospel Conversation with?

What are ways you can get into more gospel conversations?

STAGE 5: GOSPEL DECISION

Stage 5 is about decision. Everyone has to decide to accept the free gift of salvation. May we never talk about the life we have been given without immediately and often offering it to those we share with! After sharing the gospel, immediately ask what they think. Ask if this is something they want. They could decide immediately after you share the gospel, or it could take 40 years of sharing the gospel and your life with someone. Be faithful and obedient in whatever that process looks like. But offer it.

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Who do you know has heard the gospel, whether from you or somewhere else, but has not yet made a decision to follow Jesus?

How can you partner with God in bringing people in your life to a point of decision?

If someone says yes, then help them respond to God. Make sure they know what they are responding to and realize they are making a life changing decision. And then help them simply and honestly talk to God in prayer. As they pray, lead them to:

1. Confess to God that they are broken and have sinned.
2. Communicate that they believe that God has offered them salvation through Jesus.
3. Confirm that they are willing for God to be their God and submit to Him with their life.

If you are able to help lead someone to become a Christian, help them to quickly share their decision with other Christians that you and they both know. Also help them start journaling. Ask them to make their first entry about all the circumstances, thoughts, and feelings that surrounded their decision. Both of these actions help solidify their decision so that it doesn't just seem like a rash decision in a few days or weeks. This helps the seed of the gospel be firmly planted in the soil of their life. And finally, get them one of these booklets (A Grow Book) so they can begin learning more about how to follow Jesus and have a relationship with God that "perseveres and produces a crop."

