



# **foundations**

*knowing God through his word*



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*for no one can lay a foundation  
other than that which is laid,  
**which is Jesus Christ.***

**1 corinthians 3:11**



loving him  
& loving his.

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# can we know God?

God has given his unfailing word to make himself known to his children. yet, far too often, we depend on other voices to tell us about God instead of knowing him for ourselves through his word.

God is continually pursuing our hearts; our affections for and knowledge of God grow as we spend time with him. **this needs to be our daily pursuit.**

every child of God is able to intimately know God through the scriptures—**we are all called to know him and make him known.** as we grow in our knowledge of him, we also get to invite others to grow in their knowledge of him through discipleship.

*foundations* was created to encourage an active learning process for discipling relationships. it in no way replaces scripture as the authority on any topic or truth; rather, it is intended to point you to scripture in your growing understanding of God and his word. the purpose of this tool is to assist in laying a solid biblical foundation, equip believers to study the bible, and disciple others to do the same.

## a few notes as you begin:

### • engage

each chapter of foundations includes an introduction and four sections. this format provides a structure for meeting together regularly to study and discuss the word. **consider focusing on just one section of a chapter each week.** this pace will allow you to enjoy several days engaging with the word and reflecting on what the Holy Spirit reveals to you before you meet to talk about it.

however, you are welcome to move through it at whatever pace works for your discipling relationship. everything is provided for your benefit—feel free to use it in the way that works best for you as the Spirit leads.

### • pray

it is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth (john 16:13); anytime we seek to read or study scripture, **we need to first pray** that the Holy Spirit will illuminate our minds to understand the truths we read and soften our hearts to let scripture transform us.

### • worship

resist the temptation to treat any of this as an item on a checklist or see this as homework. the end goal of this resource is not that you would finish any of it in a specific timeframe, but that you would grow to know and enjoy God more. **as we gain a greater vision of God through his word, our worship of him will deepen.**

**teach me your way,  
o Lord, that i may walk  
in your truth; unite my  
heart to fear your name.**

**psalm 86:11**

# why discipleship?

the story of God is the story of a king saving his people and building his eternal kingdom—a kingdom that is made up of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. his is an ever-expanding kingdom, and it includes us as **disciples of Jesus.**

before Jesus returned to heaven after his resurrection, he commanded his disciples to go and make disciples who would then make disciples (matthew 28:19-20). you are reading these words as a result of their obedience and the obedience of generations of men and women after them.

Jesus' command to make disciples applies just as much to us today as it did to his original followers. **he desires disciples, not merely converts.** he wants us to be active followers and worshippers of him, not simply spectators and fans.

as you use this resource, do not let this be merely a cognitive exercise. discipleship is not simply knowing more about God, but rather it is **knowing God intimately and daily surrendering your life to his lordship.**

this is the essence of  
discipleship: **follow  
me as together we  
follow Christ.**

read slowly, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you more of who God is and his steadfast love for you specifically. pray that your heart and mind would be moved to worship as you meet with God in his word.

**in order to love God we must know him.** as our knowledge of him grows, we get to make him known. as members of the body of Christ, we get to spur one another on towards Christ-likeness through discipleship.

this is the essence of discipleship: follow me as together we follow Christ. the commandment hasn't changed—we are to be discipled to make disciples who make disciples. his kingdom is made up of people who know him, love him, and follow him. **if you belong to him, you are a part of that kingdom.**

» *Jesus is building his kingdom through our active participation in discipleship. as you start this journey, begin praying now about who God might be leading you to disciple as you grow in him.*

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*so then you are no longer strangers and aliens,  
but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members  
of the household of God, **built on the foundation  
of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself  
being the cornerstone.***

**ephesians 2:19-20**

**what is  
the bible?**

# what is the bible?

the life of a disciple of Jesus begins with knowing God through his self-revelation—his word, the bible. as followers of Jesus, we look to the bible as **our final authority for life and truth**.

but what exactly is the bible, and how do we know we can trust it?

we will let the bible speak for itself in the coming days and weeks, but first...

## a few helpful details:

- the bible is made up of **66 books**: 39 in the old testament and 27 in the new testament.
- in its original text, the old testament is written in **hebrew**, with some sections being written in **aramaic**, and the new testament is written primarily in **greek**.
- the bible, while one book, is made up of **different writing styles and genres**: narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, epistles, and apocalyptic.
- while written by **over 40 human authors over a span of 1,500 years**, every word of the bible has been given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

as we begin, take a minute to consider and make note of what you currently know or believe about the bible.

» *what have you been taught about the bible?*

» *when you think about the bible, what questions come to mind?*

**apart from God's written word, we would have no way to intimately know him.**

the bible is God's self-revelation of his character and the story of his faithfulness to his people. it also unveils his plan of redemption through his son, Jesus Christ, who is king of the kingdom God is building.

God, in his benevolent love and grace, has made himself known to his image bearers through his written word. the bible teaches us everything we need to know to love and follow God—anytime we read his word we need to be asking, **“what does this scripture tell me about God and his character?”** because the entire bible is all about him!

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*for whatever was written in former days was  
written for our instruction, that through endurance and  
through the encouragement of the scriptures  
we might have hope.*

romans 15:4

# authority

» *as we begin to talk about the authority of scripture, it is helpful to first understand what is generally meant by the term authority. how would you define the word? does it conjure up positive or negative connotations for you? why?*

as followers of Christ, we build our lives on the authority of scripture, so we look to the bible to see what God says about his own word.

- deuteronomy 12:32; 13:1-4
- isaiah 40:8
- matthew 5:17-19
- john 17:7-8, 17
- romans 15:4
- 1 thessalonians 2:13

» *what do these scriptures say about God's word? was any of this new or surprising to you?*

» *drawing from what you read, why is it imperative that we believe wholeheartedly in the authority of scripture?*

**the bible is authoritative; it is unchanging, absolute truth.**

the authority of the bible is the standard by which we evaluate the truthfulness of every other voice we hear...including our own. the bible is not primarily a list of rules to live by because God is not merely concerned with our right behavior—he is **jealous for our hearts and our minds**.

we must always seek to understand what God is saying in his word and not infuse our own meaning into the text. the bible is authoritative and infallible; our interpretation of the bible is not. we are not to use scripture to support our own desires and agendas. rather, as we read God's word with the help of the Holy Spirit, **our minds will be renewed, our hearts will soften, and we will change to become more like Christ** as we live in response to the authority of scripture.

- deuteronomy 30:11-20
- psalm 40:6-8
- psalm 119:160
- jeremiah 7:23-24
- john 8:31-32
- james 1:21-25

» *what are some qualities of a life lived in submission to the authority of scripture? what does this mean for your daily life?*

ultimately, we submit to the authority of the bible because we have surrendered our lives to the authority of God, and **the bible is the very word of God**.

“since God is the author, the bible is authoritative. it is absolute in its authority for human thought and behaviour. ‘as the scripture has said’ is a recurring theme throughout the new testament. in fact, the new testament contains more than two hundred direct quotations of the old testament. in addition, the new testament has a large and uncertain number of allusions to the old. new testament writers, following the example of Jesus Christ, built their theology on the old testament. for Christ and the apostles, to quote the bible was to settle an issue.”  
—robertson mcquilk

# sufficiency

scripture is authoritative above all other sources, yet consider this question:

» *throughout your life, what has most informed your knowledge of God?*

when we speak of the sufficiency of scripture, we mean that the bible alone is God's word and **nothing else is necessary for each of us to know him**—no additional teachings or books will teach us more about God than that which the bible has already revealed.

there can often be a largely unspoken belief that only pastors and theologians can really understand the bible, and the rest of us need to rely on them to tell us what it says. but rest assured: **the entire word of God is written for all the people of God for all time**. it is closed and complete; we are not waiting on any further revelation or new word from God.

the bible, being the very word of God, is enough for each of us to know and follow God. scripture interprets scripture, so when we come across a passage where the meaning is unclear, **looking up cross references will often give us a fuller understanding**.

consider these verses and how they point to the sufficiency of scripture in the life of a believer.

- deuteronomy 4:1-2
- psalm 19:7-11
- psalm 119:97-105
- proverbs 30:5-6
- matthew 24:35
- luke 24:44-45
- john 20:30-31
- 2 peter 1:3-8

commentaries and other outside sources can be useful in helping us grow in our understanding of God's word, but they should never replace God's word in our minds and hearts. nor should we ever elevate what we read outside of scripture above scripture itself. **only the bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God**. the words of mere humans can never tell us more about God than God himself has revealed to us in his word.

not everything that is written or taught about God is necessarily true or faithful to God's word. that is why it is crucial that we, as followers of Christ, become intimately familiar with the bible so we can quickly spot false teaching.

what do these verses tell us about teachings that go against scripture?

- mark 13:22-23
- galatians 1:6-9
- colossians 2:8
- 2 timothy 4:3-4

» *in what ways does our culture and the world tell us that scripture isn't enough?*

» *why is it important to believe in the sufficiency of scripture? what dangers could we encounter if we don't?*

» *now, with a greater understanding of the sufficiency of scripture, ask the Lord to show you other voices you have relied on to inform your knowledge of him.*



# authorship

the 66 books of the bible were written by approximately 40 human authors, but the bible is also **one book written by one author: God**. this was not a collaborative effort where God contributed some and human authors contributed the rest; God the Holy Spirit was inspiring every word of scripture through the individual personalities and writing styles of those whom he chose for the task of penning his word.

**in scripture, we receive the voice of God in human words.**

since the beginning of time, God has been speaking. he is a God who loves to communicate with and longs to be known by his children, and he's still speaking to us today through his written word.

in the **old testament**, God communicated his message to and through prophets, priests, and kings who then wrote as God's mouthpiece to his people.

- numbers 12:6
- 2 samuel 23:1-2
- isaiah 30:8-11
- jeremiah 30:1-4
- daniel 9:9-10
- habakkuk 2:1-3

in the **new testament**, God communicated to and through disciples, witnesses, and church leaders who wrote personal accounts and letters to churches. additionally, the new testament contains the very words of Jesus himself.

- luke 4:16-21
- john 14:1-7
- 2 timothy 3:16-17
- hebrews 1:1-2
- 2 peter 1:16-21
- revelation 21:5-7

» *what do you see in these scriptures that speaks to the divine authorship of the words written by men?*

» *we must keep in mind that both the old and the new testament were written with the divine authority of the same triune God. why is this important as we consider the authorship of scripture?*

the tension of the divine and the human authorship being contained in one book is ultimately not something we can fully comprehend. similarly, when Jesus entered the word as a baby, he embodied both the divine and the human in one being: both fully God and fully man.

**both of these truths are a mystery.** our faith enables us to trust what we cannot understand, and this faith is a gracious gift from God.

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*so faith comes from hearing,  
and hearing through the word of Christ.*

romans 10:17

# power

the bible is unlike any other book ever written because it contains the very words of God. it has the power to **soften hearts and change lives** as it reveals God to us through his word.

God is still speaking to his children through his written word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

sanctify them  
in the truth,  
your word is truth.

john 17:17

» if you read the bible as the very voice of God rather than merely print on a page, how would that change how you interact with scripture?

» what needs to change in order for you to come to the scriptures expecting to hear God's voice?

in genesis 1, we see the repetition of "and God said" followed by action; whatever God spoke became reality. the same voice that spoke creation into existence speaks to us today through the written word of God.

as you read the verses below, notice all the ways you see the power of God's word.

- psalm 29:1-9
- isaiah 55:8-11
- jeremiah 23:29
- matthew 4:4
- john 1:1-5
- 2 timothy 3:14-15
- hebrews 4:12-13
- 1 peter 1:22-25

» how would you define power? what does it mean to you that God's word has power?

» how have you experienced the power of God's word in your own life?

**God's word has the power to renew our minds and transform our lives.** we have access to that power every single day as God invites us to know his power through his word.

» pause and reflect on the supernatural gift of God's word and how he desires to reveal himself to you through it:

- thank him for his word.
- confess to him any struggles you have with it.
- bring to him any questions you have about the bible.
- ask him for a greater understanding and an insatiable hunger for his word.

for the word of the cross is folly to those who are  
perishing, but to us who are being saved  
it is the power of God.

1 corinthians 1:18

**who is God?**

# who is God?

often when we hear the name *God*, we think exclusively of God the father—and yet our God is triune. **he has eternally existed as one Godhead in three persons:** God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit. this three-in-one doctrine of God is known as *the trinity*. all three are of one essence and are co-equal and co-eternal. **each person of the trinity is fully God.**

although there is one shared divine will within the Godhead, **they each carry out different roles in redemption.** God the father is eternally a father to God the son. as father, he initiates redemption by sending his son to accomplish the eternal plan of salvation. the Spirit is then sent from both the father and the son to apply the work of salvation to our lives and unite us to Christ for all eternity.

so when we speak of the attributes and character of God, **what is true of God the father is also always true of God the son and God the Holy Spirit.**

» *why is it necessary to believe that God is both one and three?*

we live in a post-christian nation where many claim to be “spiritual” and would assent to the existence of a higher power yet do not know the one true God. there are many different ideas about God and theories about the nature of who God is. this is why **we so desperately need to know the triune God of the bible**, because the god of our culture and of our liking is not the true God of creation.

at the beginning of time, God made humankind in his own image; however, far too often we tend to make him in our own image by viewing him according to our human nature and desires. **the God of the bible is not like us; he is transcendent**—beyond the limits of all possible knowledge and experience. although he is not necessarily always who we think we want him to be, he is absolutely always everything we need him to be.

“a God who is all love,

» what are some culturally popular views of God?

» how would you define or describe God?  
what informs your view of him?

» *what questions do you have about God?*

the attributes of God are vast and essential to our understanding of who God is. some of these attributes apply to God alone (incommunicable). some can also be true of us—although never perfectly—because we are made in his image (communicable).

here are few examples of God's attributes:

**incommunicable**

- omnipresence
- omniscience
- omnipotence
- immutability
- self-existence
- eternality
- sovereignty

**communicable**

- goodness
- justice
- love
- mercy
- truthfulness
- wisdom
- holiness

» *which of these truths about God most leads you to worship him?*

» *what other attributes of God would you add to these lists?*

# holy

» *before we dive into this attribute, consider what comes to mind when you hear the word holy. in your own words, how would you define holiness?*

God is holy in and of himself—he is entirely set apart and has no equal. he is absolutely perfect and separated from all sin. his divine purity is untainted by evil and he is faultless in all his ways. it is in and because of his holiness that he intentionally does all things.

it is his holiness that stirs our awe and reverence—the holiness of God is both beautiful and terrifying:

- exodus 3:1-6
- deuteronomy 5:24
- 1 samuel 2:2
- hebrews 12:28-29

**God is jealous for the integrity of his holiness and glory.** God's jealousy is not like ours—his jealousy comes from his holiness, whereas our jealousy comes from our selfish desires, fears, and insecurities. God is jealous for us to worship him alone because there is no one holier or more worthy of worship.

- exodus 20:1-7
- exodus 34:14
- isaiah 42:8
- ezekiel 36:20-23

in our sin, we cannot stand in the presence of God's holiness. because he is holy, our sin separates us from God forever if we are not in Christ, but **because of Jesus, we too can be called holy.**

- genesis 3:22-24
- colossians 1:21-22
- hebrews 12:14
- 1 peter 1:13-16

ultimately, we will worship him in his holiness for all eternity.

- exodus 15:11
- psalm 96:6-9
- isaiah 6:1-7
- revelation 4:8-11

as you reflect on what you've read, consider these questions:

- » *how have these verses shaped how you view God's holiness?*
- » *do you truly believe that, in Christ, God sees you as holy? why or why not?*
- » *in learning about God's holiness, what most draws you to worship him?*

"if God is holy, then he can't sin. if God can't sin, then he can't sin against me. if he can't sin against me, shouldn't that make him the most trustworthy being there is?" —jackie hill perry

» *what do you believe about God's love, or what have you been taught about it?*

he is love eternal

**every attribute of God is true of him fully and eternally**; love is no exception. from eternity past, before time began, God has always lived in loving communion as one Godhead in the persons of the trinity: God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit. he has eternally been satisfied in himself not needing anything or lacking in any way.

- God is love eternal so everything he does is done in love.** it is out of that love that God created and sustains the universe and everything in it—including you and me. we live to love and glorify him.

## he loved us first

- there is nothing we could have ever done to earn God's love for us. God loves us because he chose to love us. as a child of God, you are fully loved by him regardless of anything you have done; love is his motivation in choosing you.

- deuteronomy 7:6-8
- job 7:17
- john 3:16
- romans 5:6-11
- ephesians 2:4-5
- 1 john 4:7-19

» *why is it important to believe that God loved us first?*

## his love endures forever

- the phrase *steadfast love* is used approximately 200 times throughout the bible to describe God's unending love for his people. God's love for us is based upon his own faithfulness to his covenant promises, and we can trust his faithfulness. just as there is nothing we can do to *earn* God's love, there is also nothing we have to do to *keep* God's love.

- deuteronomy 7:9
- psalm 136:1-26
- jeremiah 31:3
- romans 8:38-39

**God is love from eternity past and his love will endure through all of eternity future.**

because he loves us first—before us and in spite of us—we can be set free from any false belief that we have to live perfectly for God to love us or keep loving us. we get to live holy lives because we *are* loved—not in order to *be* loved.

» *considering these verses, what most captures your heart? what truth about God's love do you desperately need to cling to right now?*

» *take some time to worship God and thank him for his great love for you.*

## omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent

occasionally, there are theological terms used to describe God and his work that do not actually show up in the text of scripture. however, the concepts they describe are clearly spelled out in God's word. *omniscient*, *omnipotent*, and *omnipresent* are three such terms.

these are the words that we use to affirm that **God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and is fully present everywhere at all times.** he is not bound by time or space or any other limits. he alone is above and outside of these things that constrain us in our human existence, and these are attributes that must be true of him in order for him to truly be transcendent.

**omniscience**

God is all-knowing, there is nothing about anything that God does not already know. this means nothing in all of history or in the future will catch God by surprise. this also means that there is nothing about you—no thought or detail of your life—that is not fully known by God.

- 1 kings 8:37-39
- 1 chronicles 28:9
- psalm 56:8
- isaiah 46:9-10
- luke 12:7
- 1 john 3:19-20

» *what does God specifically know according to these scriptures?*

» *is it comforting or disconcerting to think about God knowing absolutely everything? why?*

**omnipotence**

God is all-powerful. there is nothing he cannot do. no one and no thing in heaven or earth or under the earth is equal to or more powerful than our God. it is important to note that just because he *can* do anything, doesn't necessarily mean he will. rather, he is able to do everything in accordance with his divine will. he has the power to accomplish his purposes and fulfill his promises.

- job 26:7-14
- jeremiah 10:12-13
- matthew 8:23-27
- romans 1:20
- 1 corinthians 6:14
- ephesians 3:14-21

» *what do these verses reveal about God's power?*

» *how have you seen his power at work?*

» *what are some practical ways you can rely on God's power in your everyday life?*

**omnipresence**

God is everywhere. since God is spirit, he is not confined to time or space or a body as we are. he is with us, wherever we are, while at the same time with a believer on the other side of the globe. because this is true, we can be sure that he is always present—always with us in every moment of every day, allowing us to abide in him continuously.

- deuteronomy 31:6-8
- 1 kings 8:22-27
- jeremiah 23:23-24
- ezekiel 37:14
- matthew 28:18-20
- ephesians 4:4-6

» *what examples do these scriptures give of God's boundless presence?*

» do you ever struggle to believe that God is with you? why or why not?

» *how do these three attributes produce in you a greater awe and reverence for God?*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





**who is Jesus?**

isaiah 9:6

- **immanuel**—isaiah 7:14
- **man of sorrows**—isaiah 53:3
- **son of man**—matthew 20:28
- **savior**—luke 2:11
- **friend of sinners**—luke 7:34
- **word of God**—john 1:1
- **creator**—john 1:2-4
- **lamb of God**—john 1:29
- **son of God**—john 1:34
- **bread of life**—john 6:33-35
- **light of the world**—john 8:12, 9:5
- **good shepherd**—john 10:11-15
- **the way, the truth, and the life**—john 14:6
- **lord**—romans 10:9
- **redeemer**—galatians 4:4-5
- **high priest**—hebrews 4:14-16
- **founder and perfecter of our faith**—hebrews 12:2
- **lion of judah**—revelation 5:5
- **king**—revelation 19:11-16
- **alpha and omega**—revelation 22:13

Jesus, the eternally existent son of God has been the word of God since creation. he is the lion of judah and the sacrificial lamb of God who is the way, the truth, and the life. in the incarnation, he came as the son of man—immanuel, God with us—in order to become our savior and our great high priest who intercedes for us before the father. and for those of us who have trusted in him, he is now and forever, our Lord and king.

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# son of God

the son of God is the second member of the trinity. he is eternal and co-equal with both God the father and God the Holy Spirit. although he is the son, he is in no way less than God the father, nor was he created by the father.

because of our understanding of the human father-son relationship, it can be difficult to comprehend how a son could be both equal to and not created by a father, but the bible tells us that **the son is God just as much as the father is God.**

- john 10:30-38
- john 14:8-11
- 2 corinthians 4:3-6
- colossians 1:15-17

» *what questions do you have about Jesus as the son of God or about his relationship to God the father?*

Jesus, before he ever came to earth as a baby in a manger, has always been the eternally existent son of God. there was never a time when God the father existed without the son. **Jesus is now and has always been fully God.**

while our finite minds can never grasp a timeless eternity past, there was a point in history when time began, and the son of God was there—present and active in the works of creation.

- genesis 1:26
- proverbs 30:4
- john 1:1-3
- john 17:5
- hebrews 11:1-3
- revelation 21:6

» *have you ever considered the son of God to be actively involved in creation? does this change how you read the creation account? why or why not?*

» *in what ways is the eternity of Jesus significant?*

during his earthly ministry, **Jesus publicly proclaimed that he is the one and only God.** this infuriated the religious leaders of the day who accused him of blasphemy. their anger and indignation drove them to sentence him to death. the son of God was crucified because they would rather silence him than surrender to him as God. this was the plan of God from before time began—our redemption through his crucified son.

- mark 14:55-64
- john 8:34-59
- acts 2:23-24
- revelation 22:13

» *the crucifixion of Jesus was always the eternal plan of the triune God. what are the implications of this truth?*

whoever confesses  
that **Jesus is the son  
of God**, God abides in  
him, and he in God.

1 john 4:15

# son of man

from eternity past, the son of God dwelled in glory and perfect fellowship with God the father and God the Holy Spirit. in the incarnation, God put on human flesh—the **son of God became, for us, the son of man in the person of Jesus.**

- john 1:14
- romans 8:3-4
- galatians 4:4-5
- hebrews 2:14-18

» *why was it necessary for God the son to become the son of man?*

Jesus left glory and came to earth, but in doing so he never lost a single element of his divinity as he lived as a man among men. he was always, at every moment on earth, **both fully God and fully man.** because he was fully man, he experienced the joys and trials of the human life like we do—except because he is fully God, he did it perfectly and completely without sin.

- isaiah 53:2-5
- matthew 4:1-11
- mark 10:45
- mark 15:16-20
- john 11:32-44
- hebrews 4:15

» *how do these verses show Jesus' true humanity as the son of man?*

» *Jesus Christ, the son of man, encountered temptation and felt pain in ways similar to what you have endured. how does this impact how you come to him with your sin and suffering?*

just as the son retained his divinity in the incarnation, in the resurrection he rose to life in bodily form and **is now both God and man forever.** his ministry and claims of divinity were proven true by his physical resurrection.

- acts 1:9-11
- acts 7:55-56
- 1 timothy 2:5
- hebrews 13:8

in his resurrection, he also proves that **our promised resurrection is both physical and true,** not merely spiritual or theoretical. he has gone before us in his physical, glorified body; one day, we too, will be with him in our glorified, incorruptible, imperishable but very physical bodies.

- luke 24:36-43
- acts 26:22-23
- romans 8:22-23
- 1 corinthians 15:20-24, 53
- philippians 2:5-8
- philippians 3:20-21

» *have you ever considered that Jesus will forever be both God and man? how does this affect your view of your relationship with him?*

“the eternal divine son didn’t simply make a cameo in the created world. he forever joined our humanity to his divinity and for all eternity will be fully God and fully man.” —**david mathis**

# savior

since the fall of humanity, we have been under the curse of sin and death. in disobeying God, adam and eve sinned, causing insurmountable separation between humankind and the God of the universe. because of the holiness of God, under the curse of sin, **our debt to him requires either perfect obedience or our very lives.**

but no man is able to do all that is required to perfectly fulfill the law and live a sinless life. no human could die on our behalf to save us from the wrath of God. only God himself could accomplish this task.

in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.

ephesians 1:7-8

God the son became the son of man in order to become our savior.

- genesis 2:15-17
- romans 6:23
- colossians 2:13-15

Jesus' perfect life was absolutely necessary to accomplish our salvation. under the sacrificial system in the old testament, there was a repeated requirement for the sacrifice: it had to be an animal without blemish. for that reason, Jesus Christ, as the sacrificial lamb of God, had to be perfect in every way so that, covered by his blood and righteousness, we could also be seen by God as perfect.

- ephesians 5:25-27
- colossians 1:21-22
- 1 peter 1:18-21

in the crucifixion, all the sin and unrighteousness that was ours was placed upon Christ on the cross. when he died, our guilt, the curse of sin, died too. in one moment in time, **he endured what was our eternal plight: the wrath of God on account of sin.** the pain of the burden he gladly took on was fully felt by him—every excruciating second. this is what he came to accomplish for our salvation.

- psalm 22:16-18
- isaiah 53:10-11
- luke 22:39-46
- hebrews 9:23-28
- hebrews 12:1-2
- 1 peter 2:24

» *the pain that Christ endured is unimaginable, and yet he did it willingly.*  
*what is the posture of your heart towards him as you consider the crucifixion?*

he became our savior because there was no way for us to save ourselves.

in john 19:30, Jesus says, "*it is finished*" as he breathed his last on the cross. in uttering these words, Jesus declared that the debt we owe has been paid in full; there is nothing else to be done or added to his work for us to be saved. **we can rest in his finished work** and the grace that he lavishes upon us.

» *in what ways are you tempted to "work" to make yourself right with God?*  
 » *is it easy for you to rest in his grace? why or why not?*

"Christ is much more powerful to save, than adam was to destroy." —john calvin

# lord and king

we are eager and delighted to have Jesus as our savior, but he is so much more.  
**he is both our savior and our Lord and king.**

when we confess that Jesus is our Lord, we are willingly yielding our lives to his authority and control—**we surrender our lives to him.** this truth gives many of us pause because we often desire to be lord and king of our own lives.

» *in what ways do you strive to rule your own life?*

surrender may sound undesirable, but in truth, **it is freeing.** we no longer have to live according to the demanding desires of our sinful nature; instead, we get to live in glad, daily submission to our kind and loving Lord.

- luke 9:23-24
- romans 10:9-10
- philippians 2:9-11
- colossians 1:13-14

» *have you surrendered yourself to Jesus, making him Lord of your life?*  
*if so, take time to reflect on that journey and praise him for his work in your life.*  
*if not, what is keeping you from making him your Lord?*

salvation is so much more than just escaping eternal damnation: we have been saved by *the* king into the kingdom of God. we are not saved to serve ourselves or build our own little kingdoms, but we are to be about building his true and lasting kingdom. we cannot live in two kingdoms or serve two kings.

**he alone is king and deserves our full allegiance and unbridled worship.**

- isaiah 9:6-7
- daniel 7:13-14
- luke 1:30-33
- john 18:36-37

» *what do you learn about Jesus and his kingdom from these verses?*  
 » *spend time gazing at Jesus your king. how does this view of him deepen your worship?*

in the crucifixion, Christ became our savior by putting to death our sin and guilt once and for all. in the resurrection, he walked out of the grave, proving once and for all **he has power over even death itself.** once dead but now alive, Christ sits at the right hand of God the father as the ruling and reigning king of kings and Lord of lords.

- romans 6:9-10
- romans 14:7-9
- hebrews 1:1-12
- revelation 1:17-18

» *when you consider the facets of Jesus in these four sections, which aspect of him most resonates with you?*  
 » *which part does he need to help you understand and love more deeply?*

*the lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and king of kings,  
 and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.*

**who is the  
Holy Spirit?**

# who is the Holy Spirit?

for most people, the Holy Spirit is the least understood member of the trinity. we can somewhat wrap our brains around the fact that God the son became God in the flesh as the son of man, Jesus. additionally, God the father, although he is spirit, is frequently described in scripture with human physical and emotional characteristics which can help us relate to him.

perhaps one reason the Holy Spirit is more challenging to understand is simply because people often avoid discussing what the scriptures have to say about him; **lack of knowledge has led to a fear of the unknown**. we don't want to risk getting him wrong, so we just ignore him all together.

» *before you begin this section, reflect on what you know about the Holy Spirit and what questions you have concerning him.*

in the same way that God the father and God the son are eternal, so too is God the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit is referred to throughout scripture with the personal *he*, not the abstract *it*. he is not inanimate or unrelatable.

**he is so many things to and for us:**

- **breath of God**—job 32:8, 33:4
- **helper**—john 14:16
- **reminder**—john 14:26
- **advocate**—john 16:7-8
- **teacher**—john 16:13-14
- **divine power**—acts 1:8
- **witness**—romans 8:16
- **intercessor**—romans 8:26-27
- **sanctifier**—romans 15:14-17
- **revealer**—1 corinthians 2:10-11
- **gift giver**—1 corinthians 12:7-11
- **security**—ephesians 1:13-14
- **wisdom**—ephesians 1:16-19
- **truth**—1 john 4:6

while the Holy Spirit has always existed, in the old testament, our human access to him was limited. he only came upon specific individuals for specific purposes. however, there was the promise of a new covenant: **one day the Holy Spirit would indwell all who called upon the name of the Lord**.

the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus ushered in this new covenant, and with it came the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit for every son and daughter of God. covered by the blood of Christ and made one with him, the chasm separating us from God has been bridged, and his Spirit is now forever ours as well. if you are a child of God, the Holy Spirit is as near to you as your own heartbeat.

*and it shall come to pass afterward, that  
i will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...  
and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

**joel 2:28,32**





## helper

the life of a christian centers on increasingly becoming more like Christ, which is not something we can do on our own—nor does God expect us to. **he has given us his indwelling Spirit to help us** live *“in a manner worthy of [our] calling”* (ephesians 4:1).

in the original language of the new testament, the greek word that is often used synonymously with the Holy Spirit is *paraclete*. because of the limitations of language, there is no exact translation for *paraclete* in english.

in the english standard version of the bible, *paraclete* is most often translated as *helper*. however, other translations also use: *advocate*, *counselor*, or *comforter*, and all are correct because *paraclete*, in a single word, means all of those things.

the Holy Spirit is indeed our helper, advocate, counselor, and comforter.

God's promise to restore his presence with his people culminated in the incarnation of Jesus. after years of friendship and physical proximity to his followers, with his crucifixion imminent, Jesus comforted his disciples by promising that **God the father would send another helper in his place** who would be with them forever. though their hearts and minds could not fathom it, Jesus insisted it would actually be better for him to leave so the helper could come.

- matthew 10:16-20
- john 14:15-21
- john 15:26
- john 16:7-11
- romans 5:3-5
- galatians 5:22-25

» *what do these verses reveal about the Holy Spirit being our helper, advocate, counselor, and comforter? how do these truths broaden your understanding of him?*

» *in what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit be your paraclete?*

## reading with God

while God has given us his word that we might know him, **we need his help to even understand what we are reading.** the word is “*living and active*” (hebrews 4:12) because the Spirit inside us is living and active and present as we read and meditate on the scriptures.

**the Holy Spirit illumines our minds as we read scripture**, teaching us the truths of God and convicting us of sin. without depending on the Holy Spirit—asking for his wisdom and praying for understanding—reading the bible simply becomes an empty religious duty. without the Holy Spirit, we cannot know God. **with the Spirit, you and i have the mind of Christ** (1 corinthians 2:16).

- john 14:22-26
- john 16:12-15
- 1 corinthians 2:9-16
- 2 timothy 2:7

## praying to God

just as the Holy Spirit helps as we read the word, **he also helps us communicate with God.** prayer can be difficult. we don't always know what to say or how to verbalize what is on our hearts. sometimes all we have to offer is unfiltered crying in pain or raging in anger at God; those are prayers from our lips, but this is where the Spirit intercedes on our behalf **knowing both our hearts and the mind of God.**

sometimes spending time with the Lord involves saying no words at all; we are free to sit in silence, acknowledging he is God and we are secure in him. **the Holy Spirit abiding in us is the very Spirit of God** and is our intercessor before God the father. he helps us in our weakness, so we can rest in his strength.

- romans 8:26-27
- ephesians 6:16-19
- jude 1:20-21

» *currently, where do you most need the help of the Holy Spirit?*

» *take a moment to confess your weaknesses and receive his perfect counsel.*

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**divine power**

shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave his disciples this command: *"go therefore and make disciples of all nations"* (matthew 28:19).

go. to all nations. make disciples.

surely an impossible feat for mere humans. they would need power—divine power—to accomplish such a lofty mission. which is why Jesus coupled this command with a caveat: stay put until you receive power from on high. Jesus knew, **without the coming of the promised indwelling Holy Spirit, their words would have no power**, and they would likely cower in fear in the same way they had at his arrest and crucifixion.

- acts 1:4-8
- acts 2:1-11
- acts 4:7-13

» **read matthew 26:69-75 and acts 3:1-16.** *compare peter before and after receiving the Holy Spirit.*

» *are there any similar comparisons you can make in your own life: your life without the Holy Spirit versus your life with the Holy Spirit?*

**the Holy Spirit is the divine power of God.** he was at work both in creation and in the conception of Jesus, and if you are his, he is at work in you. we have access to that same power through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

we are intentionally unable to live the holy, set-apart life to which we have been called without the divine power of the Holy Spirit. we cannot come to Christ without this power drawing us to him. **by the power of the Spirit, we can surrender our lives to our Lord and king**, and together with paul say, *“it is no longer i who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (galatians 2:20).

- zechariah 4:6-7
- romans 15:13
- romans 8:9-11
- 1 thessalonians 1:4-7

» *in what ways do these verses speak of the Holy Spirit's power?*

» *what questions do you have about the power of the Holy Spirit?*

as we walk in the power of the Spirit, **we are changed into the image of Christ** for our own sanctification and for the building up of God's church. accordingly, the Holy Spirit empowers us by giving us each gifts that have been chosen for us from the foundation of the world. by the power of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are changed and our desires increasingly mirror those of our Lord Jesus.

- romans 15:14-20
- 1 corinthians 6:9-11
- 1 corinthians 12:4-11
- ephesians 3:14-21

» how does seeing the power of the Holy Spirit in these verses encourage your intimacy with and obedience to God?

» *in what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit's power at work in your life?*

“when we have the Holy Spirit, we have all that is needed to be all that God desires us to be.” —**a.w. tozer**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# security

the life of a believer is a life of faith. yet in this fallen world, our faith can often be easily shaken. **suffering, temptation, sin, and doubt can work to shatter our confidence.** there may be times when we feel like we are holding onto faith—with both fists clenched—desperately clinging to Jesus.

**God knew.** he knew we would doubt and struggle and waiver, and in his grace, he has provided for all of our insecurities. the Holy Spirit has been given as both our assurance and our guarantee of the eternal life we have in Christ Jesus. faith is not something we can prove, but is rather something that is proven in us as we live and walk by the Spirit.

now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

hebrews 11:1

- romans 8:14-17
- 2 corinthians 5:1-5
- galatians 4:4-7
- ephesians 1:11-14

» *what has caused you to question your faith or doubt your salvation?*

» *how does God's word help combat those insecurities?*

in the old testament, God promises to never leave his people. in the new testament, Jesus promises to always be with his disciples. however, Jesus does not *physically* remain with them; instead he assures them he will not leave them as orphans but will live *in* them. with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God takes up residence within his children fulfilling his promise of permanence—and **that Spirit will never be taken away.**

- matthew 28:18-20
- john 14:18-20
- 2 corinthians 1:20-22

» *what are the implications of the permanent indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in your daily life?*

» *how can you become more aware of the Spirit's presence in your life?*

not one single person comes to Jesus simply out of reason or intellect. we don't have faith in God because we are somehow smarter than our unbelieving neighbor. we would not know Christ apart from the Holy Spirit. it is the Spirit of God who draws us to faith, gives us the gift of faith, and sustains us in that faith. **by the power of the Spirit we are saved, and by the power of the Spirit we will persevere to the end.**

- matthew 11:25-30
- john 6:44
- 1 corinthians 12:3
- philippians 1:6
- 1 john 3:19-24
- 1 john 4:2-4

» *in these verses, what do you see of the Spirit's pursuing and sustaining work in your salvation?*

» *how does a greater understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit help ease your doubts and fears?*

**what is  
salvation?**

# what is salvation?

*for the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. —luke 19:10*

**the gospel is ultimately about Jesus**—his perfect life, his substitutionary death, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension back to heaven. it is the story of his completed mission to rescue and redeem his people. the good news of the gospel is about so much more than just our salvation; but it is certainly not about less than that.

» *pause and reflect on the gift of salvation: what you've been saved from, what you've been saved to, and your own salvation story.*

as believers in Christ and his work, we are given salvation as a gift of God through Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit. **there is nothing you or I could do to earn God's favor**; salvation is bestowed upon us completely by the grace of God and entirely on the basis of Christ's finished work.

our salvation is given freely and is not at all based on our performance or works. this is good news! we don't have to be good enough to receive salvation and we don't have to live perfectly to keep it. **once we are saved, we are saved forever.**

**there is only one salvation...and only one way to be saved.**

we, however, are notoriously self-reliant. in our pride, we desperately desire to have something to do with our own salvation. yet scripture makes it clear that there is only one way to be saved: **through faith in Jesus Christ.**

faith is more than just cognitive assent to the existence of Jesus; it is the confession that he alone is the son of God and completely placing the assurance of our salvation on his perfect life and finished work alone.

***our works can't save us...***

***our knowledge can't save us...***

***our piety can't save us...***

**...only Jesus can save us**—fully and completely—and there is nothing we can add to our salvation. in humility, we confess that we cannot save ourselves, and in repentance, we let his saving grace wash over us as we surrender to him as king. no more striving. no more shame. his unconditional and all-sufficient grace comforts us and bolsters our faith so we can walk unwaveringly in freedom with him.

*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

**acts 4:12**

**in him [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.**

**ephesians 1:13**

## saved from what?

and the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." —genesis 2:16-17

as a result of adam's disobedience, death was now inevitable. because of his sin and our own, we were separated from God forever with no hope to redeem ourselves. humanity needed a savior.

**Jesus is savior of all who call on his name...**but exactly what have we been saved from?

**wrath**

God is fully and equally both love and justice. he would be completely just to pour out his wrath on all sinners, casting everyone to the fires of hell as punishment for sin. **in his holiness, he could not simply overlook sin—it had to be dealt with.** in love he sent Jesus to atone for sin and absorb God's wrath on our behalf. now we can live free from the fear of God's wrath and instead be reconciled to him once again.

- psalm 78:32-55
- zephaniah 1:14-18
- john 3:36
- 1 thessalonians 5:9-11

» *what response does God's wrath evoke in you?*

death

we will all taste death in this life if Jesus does not return first; however, in him we are promised eternal life after death. **life apart from Christ is an eternal death sentence**, but because of Christ, we who belong to him have no reason to even fear death. we can hold fast to the confidence that death is the doorway to new life forever with him.

- acts 2:23-24
- 1 corinthians 15:54-58
- 1 thessalonians 4:13-18
- hebrews 2:14-15

» *how do these verses give you hope in the face of death?*

## sin

in our sinful nature we are in constant rebellion against God. without the Holy Spirit, sin is our master and we gladly serve it; but **Jesus has saved us from our slavery to sin.** we are now aware of and able to resist sin through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

- isaiah 59:1-4
- galatians 5:1
- romans 7:5-6
- 1 john 2:1

» *where have you experienced freedom from sin, and where do you still need freedom?*

**satan**

**we have an enemy who wants us dead.** he hates God and he hates us—God's image bearers and the objects of his love. satan is called the accuser; he testifies of our guilt before God. although the devil can make sin look appealing, he is a thief who *"comes only to steal and kill and destroy"* (john 10:10).

- zechariah 3:1-5
- ephesians 6:10-18
- 1 peter 5:8-9
- revelation 12:7-12

» *how do these verses increase your confidence in the Lord against the enemy?*

## separation

when sin entered the world in genesis 3, it brought with it painful separation from God. **because of sin, humankind now lives in indignant rebellion against the creator.** we could never again stand in the presence of the holy God based on our own morality or accomplishments. indeed, we could never even desire to be in his presence apart from the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

- exodus 33:18-20
- ephesians 2:12-19
- ephesians 4:17-24
- colossians 1:21-22

» *in what ways have you felt the tension of separation from God in this world?*

» *what is the response of your heart as you think about having access to God's presence for all eternity?*

# justification

God is perfectly holy—morally pure—and has commanded that we be holy as well. yet our sin wrecked any possibility of obtaining this righteousness on our own—we had no means by which to justify ourselves before God.

- leviticus 19:2
- deuteronomy 28:15
- matthew 5:48
- romans 3:23
- 1 peter 1:14-16
- james 2:10

» *what thoughts come to mind when you consider God's command to be holy?*

**justification is a one time act of God** in the life of each new believer by which he has declared us righteous in his sight because of Jesus. it is a legal term which communicates that the demands of the law have been fully satisfied for those who are in Christ. at the moment of salvation, **we are eternally sealed by the Holy Spirit and forgiven of all our sins: past, present, and future.** our justification has nothing to do with what we have done or will do; it is all the work of God from beginning to end.

» *in what ways are you still trying to work to make yourself right before God?*

in faith we come to the end of ourselves and confess that we can never make ourselves holy. when we wholly trust in Christ's redemptive work to make us right before God, we are justified and **Christ's righteousness becomes our own.** robed in the holiness of Christ, we no longer stand condemned before God - both now and in eternity.

- isaiah 53:11
- romans 5:1-11
- 2 corinthians 5:21
- galatians 2:16
- galatians 3:10-11
- titus 3:4-7

» *when you sin, do you try to hide from God as adam and eve did in the garden, or do you run to him for forgiveness knowing you stand before him justified?*

» *how challenging is it for you to rest in Christ's finished work as your means of justification? why?*

not only does justification make us right with God, it will also change how we relate to one another. God has declared that none of us are able to obtain righteousness on our own. **we all equally need to be clothed in Christ's righteousness.** the field has been leveled and not one of us can boast in ourselves as we claim Christ's holiness as our own. this should free us to love and live in peace with those around us—especially our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

- isaiah 64:6
- jeremiah 9:23-24
- 1 corinthians 1:18-31
- ephesians 2:8-9

» *in what ways do you struggle with comparing yourself to other believers?*

» *how does our equal standing before God in Christ alone change the way you view and relate to your brothers and sisters in Christ?*



# sanctification

for this is the will of God, your sanctification. —1 thessalonians 4:3

justified by God through Christ, we have been given a new identity: **God now calls us holy**. yet our human lives tell us a different story—we can each look at aspects of our lives that underscore our shortcomings and indicate we're far from walking in holiness. the enemy loves to point to that evidence and shout accusations of our guilt.

but rest assured: **if you are in Christ, you are forever freed from any condemnation for your sin**. while we will never be completely sinless in this life, the Holy Spirit is doing a purifying work in our lives that will increasingly grow our distaste for sin and our insatiable desire for holiness.

- 2 corinthians 3:17-18
- 1 thessalonians 5:23-24
- titus 2:11-14
- hebrews 10:11-18

» how often are you tempted to believe you are still guilty?

**justification is instantaneous—sanctification is a lifelong process.**

in sanctification, the Holy Spirit works within us to increasingly make us look more like Christ. we have been set apart by God and we are holy before him; the more we walk in step with the Spirit, the more **our lives will reflect the holiness of Christ**. the more we know him, the more we will love him and our hearts will desire what his heart desires: our holiness.

- psalm 37:3-6
- romans 8:1-9
- 2 peters 1:2-8
- 1 john 1:8-10

» what have been some recent displays of God's sanctifying work in your life?

» in what areas of your life are you currently asking God to align your desires with his?

sanctification is not an optional add-on to justification nor is it a passive experience; **it is a cooperative work in which we daily yield to the Spirit's leading**. this is not about trying harder or doing better; if we are saved, our lives will exhibit more and more of the fruit which the Spirit is cultivating in our lives. sanctification inevitably leads to action on our part as an outflow of our continual submission to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

- leviticus 20:7-8
- john 15:1-8
- romans 6:15-23
- philippians 2:12-13
- colossians 3:1-17
- galatians 5:16-26

» in what areas of your life is the Holy Spirit currently calling you to grow in holiness?

» where are you currently resisting submission to the Spirit in your life?  
confess this to the Lord and ask him to change your heart to be fully surrendered.

“sanctification grows out of faith in Jesus Christ. remember holiness is a flower, not a root. it is not sanctification that saves, but salvation that sanctifies.”  
—charles spurgeon

# glorification

*he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*

## revelation 21:4

from the moment we are born, we are on a journey towards death. it may be 80 years or more down the road, but, unless Jesus returns first, we will all experience death. regardless of how much we exercise or how well we eat, our bodies will eventually fail us because these bodies are not eternal. we grieve sin, sickness, and loss, and **in the depths of our souls we groan that these things should not be.**

» *name some of the hardships you have seen in your own life. do these things increase your longing for eternity?*

a day is coming when those of us who belong to him will be free of our frail minds and broken bodies, and **we will be resurrected with glorified, imperishable bodies** never again to be constrained by earthly limitations and fears. therefore, we can remain steadfast through hardship because we are sure redemption and glorification of our bodies is coming, and all our earthly sorrows will no longer be remembered (isaiah 65:17).

- john 17:22-24
- 1 corinthians 15:42-53
- 2 corinthians 4:16-18
- 2 corinthians 5:1-9
- philippians 3:20-21
- hebrews 2:5-10

» *how do these truths give you a greater eternal perspective?*

» *how could this perspective change how you look at your current circumstances? how might this change how you live?*

God's presence and holiness are so incomprehensibly all-consuming that, on our own, in our sin, we cannot look upon his face and live. many in the old testament spoke of the fear they had at the thought of being in proximity to such a holy God.

however, **Jesus changed everything**. we now stand clothed in his righteousness and arrayed in his glory and, because we are in him, **we are justified in this life and glorified in the next**. we will all be transformed in the presence of God. in the life to come, not only will we receive glorified bodies, but **we will enjoy God face-to-face**.

- deuteronomy 5:22-27
- judges 13:15-22
- isaiah 6:1-5
- 1 corinthians 13:12
- hebrews 12:28-29
- revelation 7:9-17

» *as you look at eternity, what excites you more: the thought of a pain-free life or unfettered access to God himself? what might increase your affections for him in the here and now?*

» *as you consider the beauty of your salvation—both the finished work of Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in you—thank the Lord for calling you to himself, for the work he is doing in you now, and the promised glory to come.*

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*he has put eternity into man's heart. —ecclesiastes 3:11*

**what is union  
with Christ?**

## 2 corinthians 5:17

—lewis smedes

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**united to Christ**

the sin of adam alienated us from God; from that point on, all of humankind has been born into adam. every single person who has ever lived and will ever live exists in one of two realities: in adam or in Christ. if we remain in adam, we are an enemy of God and only promised death and hell. but, if we are in Christ, we not only become reconciled to God the father, we receive all the benefits that are his as well.

for as in adam all die,  
so also **in Christ** shall  
all be made alive.

## ephesians 1:1-14

the truth of our union with Christ is seen throughout the new testament; **it is foundational to both our identity and security.** spend time reading and meditating on **ephesians 1:1-14.** ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your mind and heart as you read to help you believe more confidently your unshakable security in him and know more deeply his steadfast love for you.

## 1 corinthians 15:22

- » *take note of every time being in Christ is mentioned.*
- » *what are all the things that are true of you because you are united to Christ?  
how does this affect your view of your relationship with him?*

the son of God was sent by God the father to reconcile his people to himself. in his incarnation, he came to tear the veil that separated us from God and invite us to abide in him. **this was the divine plan of the triune God from eternity past.**

the father sent the son for our redemption, the son fulfilled the requirements of our redemption, and the Holy Spirit applies that redemption to our lives. **the sending of the son was never a “plan b.”** rather, in accordance with the eternal plan and purposes of the Godhead, God the son left his glory in order to unite himself to us—and us to him.

- » *the incarnation of Christ was the plan from before the beginning of time. how does this impact your view of your salvation?*
- » *the son of God was part of making the plan that would include his incarnation, suffering, and death. what does this reveal to you about the heart of Christ?*

## john 15:1-11

using the tangible metaphor of a vine and its branches, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of being permanently united to him. **branches cannot survive apart from the vine**; neither can we survive apart from our true vine who is Christ. spend time letting the words in **john 15:1-11** cultivate a deeper understanding of the necessity of our union with Christ.

by this we know that  
**we abide in him and  
he in us**, because he  
has given us of his  
Spirit.

## 1 john 4:13

- » *pay particular attention to every mention of abiding **in Jesus**.*
- » *what is the natural growth that results from abiding in him?*
- » *what becomes of those who do not abide?*

[illegible]

## united in life

God is holy, and the only way to have eternal life with him is for us to live holy and perfectly obedient lives. yet, we are all sinners and not one of us could even hope to obtain such righteousness. one single sin separates us from God forever...unless we can claim Christ's righteousness as our own. **if we are *in Christ*, his perfectly-lived life**

**i have been crucified with Christ. it is no longer i who live, but Christ who lives in me. and the life i now live in the flesh i live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

**galatians 2:20**

**becomes ours.** in our union with Christ, what is true of his life, is true of ours as well.

because of Christ's faithfulness, we are now empowered to **live a life free from the bondage of sin.** as we abide in Christ and walk in step with the Holy Spirit, we will increasingly desire to live holy lives. however, we are forever free from any striving to live perfect lives in order to make ourselves right with God. **in our union with Christ, when God looks at us, he sees Jesus' righteousness.**

- 1 corinthians 6:15-17
- 2 corinthians 5:17-21
- colossians 2:6-7
- ephesians 4:17-24
- 2 timothy 2:11-13
- 2 peter 1:3-4

» *what does it look like to rest in Christ's finished work instead of striving to be accepted by God?*

» *what are the practical implications of recognizing that what is true of Christ's life is now true of yours as well?*

the power of our union with Christ is that we can never be separated from him. no amount of sin or lack of spiritual discipline can change the truth that we are in him eternally. **we cannot out-sin God's grace to us in Christ.** our union with Christ is permanent—we are eternally secure.

- john 5:24
- john 10:28-29
- 1 john 2:17
- 1 john 5:13

however, our *communion* with Christ can be disrupted by our sin and lack of time spent with him. it is often in these times that the enemy begins to whisper lies to us about our security in Christ. we begin to doubt the truth of our security when it doesn't *feel* true. this is precisely why knowing the truth of God's word is paramount to living and walking with assurance. **our confidence is not in how we feel, but in God's unchanging declaration that we are in Christ.**

- romans 6:1-11
- romans 8:38-39
- galatians 3:26-29
- 1 john 3:19-24

» *how do you allow what you feel to inform what you believe about your union with Christ?*

» *when do you find yourself most unsure of your security in Christ?*

"apart from our union with Christ, every effort to imitate Christ, no matter how noble and inspired at the outset, inevitably leads to legalism and spiritual defeat. but once you understand the doctrine of union with Christ, you see that God doesn't ask us to attain to what we're not. he only calls us to accomplish what already is. the pursuit of holiness is not a quixotic effort to do just what Jesus did. It's the fight to live out the life that has already been made alive in Christ." —**kevin deyoung**

# united in death

*for you have died, and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

colossians 3:3-4

being united with Christ in death is not just about our physical death and the glory that will follow. **our union with Christ in death also informs how we live our lives in the here and now.** before we were in Christ, we had no reason or ability to not sin. now that we are in Christ, we have a new heart with new desires and are able to resist sin.

to identify with the death of Jesus Christ means we must die to everything that was never a part of him.

## oswald chambers

however, our old self still fights against everything godly; therefore **we must daily die to ourselves** and our sinful desires, and surrender our will to the Spirit. this is a never-ending battle on this side of eternity, but because **Christ died and we are united to him**, we are invited and instructed to die to ourselves that we might live for God.

- luke 9:23
- romans 8:12-13
- romans 7:18-25
- 1 john 2:15-17

» *how does knowing that you are in Christ empower you to die to your sinful desires?*

» *in what ways have you found freedom in dying to self?*

our union with Christ in life also guarantees our union with him in death. **Jesus took on our sin and guilt in *his* death that we might be clothed in his righteousness in *ours*.** we are united with him in death so that we will also be raised to everlasting life. the joy of our union with Christ is that we get to spend our earthly lives and all of eternity with our savior and king. our entire life is found in him alone and **without union with Christ, there is no eternal life.**

for the wages of sin  
is death, but the free  
gift of God is eternal  
life **in Christ Jesus  
our Lord.**

romans 6:23

- romans 7:4-6
- 1 corinthians 15:53-58
- 2 corinthians 5:14-15
- philippians 3:7-11
- colossians 2:13-15
- 1 peter 1:3-7

» Jesus came to free us from the fear of death; however, in our frailty, we often still wrestle with it. what fears about death do you battle most frequently?

» ask the Holy Spirit to help you surrender those fears to God.

“Jesus’ death wasn’t to free us from dying, but to free us from the fear of death. Jesus came to liberate us so we could die up front and then live. Jesus wants to take us where only dead men and women can go.” —**erwin mcmanus**

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# identity

if we are *in Christ*, we have not only received all the riches of his glorious inheritance, we have also received a new identity. **we are no longer who we once were**—in our union with Christ we are being changed from the inside out through the work of the Holy Spirit who is inside us. the reality of who we are is forever changed.

our relationship to God has not just gone from enemy to redeemed, but...  
from enemy to **friend**...to **co-heir of the kingdom**...to the very **bride of Christ**.

friend

in sin, we lived in rebellion against God. yet, while we were still in rebellion, God, in Jesus, reconciled us to himself. we have not been transformed from rebels to merely obedient servants; **in Jesus, we are now friends of God.** he has made himself known to us—we can know and relate to him intimately as a friend.

- psalm 25:14
- john 15:13-15
- proverbs 18:24
- james 2:23

» how would you describe friendship with God? what does it look like for you to relate to God as both king of the universe and your friend?

**co-heir**

God has set his love on us, justified us, and adopted us as his own, making us beloved brothers and sisters of Christ our king. he bases his adoption of us, on the proven character and attributes of his beloved son and our brother, Jesus. **in Christ, he has adopted us and will never orphan us.**

in our adoption, we have become co-heirs of the kingdom with Christ and we are guaranteed to share in his glorious inheritance. **if we are in Christ, all that is his is ours,** and we will reign with him forever.

- mark 3:31-35
- john 1:12-13
- romans 4:13-16
- galatians 4:1-7
- hebrews 2:10-12
- revelation 1:4-6

» *how does thinking of Jesus as your elder brother change how you approach him?*

» if you are in Christ, God chose you based solely on the faithfulness of Christ.  
take time to recall all the ways you have seen his  
faithfulness and let that lead you to worship.

bride

marriage between a man and woman is designed to be the most intimate human relationship that exists. paul writes that this relationship is actually a picture of Christ and his church.

we are the bride of Christ, cherished and eternally secure.

what God has joined together, no one can separate (mark 10:9, romans 8:38-39).

this is our true identity now, yet we look forward to a day when our redemption is complete. on that day, our bridegroom and lover of our souls will adorn us in his holy splendor, seat us with honor at his table, and welcome us to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

- isaiah 54:5-6
- ephesians 5:25-33
- hosea 2:16-20
- revelation 19:6-9

» *what parallels do you see between God's design for marriage and union with Christ?*

» *how does the intimacy and permanence of these identities in Christ impact your view of your security?*

i am my beloved's  
and my beloved  
is mine.

song of solomon 6:3



**what is  
the story?**

# what is the story?

the bible is one book made up of 66 smaller books. these books vary in genre; they contain stories, poems, wisdom, prophecies, instructions, and laws. the whole bible was written over a span of 1500 years, so it can seem that the content is arbitrary and disconnected. nothing could be further from the truth. the bible was written by many different human authors, but ultimately it has one divine author.

**this is all God's story, and it is all about him.**

scripture tells one overarching story of a faithful God who pursues his people relentlessly—**literally moving heaven and earth to dwell with those who are his**. every smaller story recorded within the pages of scripture serve both to show the depravity of all people and humanity's desperate need for a savior. these accounts paint a picture of just how inadequate the greatest heroes in history were to even save themselves, let alone anyone else.

undergirding each story is the resounding theme that we need a savior and the declaration that the true savior is coming.

from the beginning of time, he has purposed to create a people for his own possession. our first parents brought sin into the world, fracturing creation and our access to a holy God. **although this grieved God, it did not surprise him.**

in the sovereignty of his divine will, God had already predetermined to send Jesus to reconcile us to himself and redeem our lives for his name's sake. one day he promises that **all things will be made new** as evil is put to death and we are able to live in the presence of our savior for all eternity.

the narrative of scripture moves from creation to the fall of adam and eve, followed by centuries of God promising a coming redemption which is fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

however, that is not the end of the story.

in the end, we are promised that God will be faithful to restore all things to their intended perfect design in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. he will eternally dwell with his people—which has been his divine plan since before time began.

creation → fall → redemption → restoration: this is the story of the bible

*"i am the alpha and the omega," says the Lord God,  
"who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."*

revelation 1:8

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# creation

there was a time when time did not exist. we cannot comprehend this—and it makes our brains hurt if we try. absolutely nothing existed—except God...

**then God spoke.** the beginning of creation was now permanently fixed in time.

» **read genesis 1:1-2:3** to familiarize yourself with the creation story. even if you have read it a thousand times before, read it again, slowly, asking the Holy Spirit to give you eyes to see and a heart to understand more deeply the wondrous works of our praise-worthy creator.

- **day 1**— heavens, earth, light, darkness
- **day 2**— sky
- **day 3**— land, sea, plants, vegetation
- **day 4**—sun, moon, stars
- **day 5**—birds, sea animals
- **day 6**—land animals, mankind

notice how the second three days of creation correlate to the first three days: this is sometimes referred to as *forming and filling*. **God first forms what he will then fill.** our God is meticulously intentional in all his works.

» *what did you notice as you read the creation story?*

» *how do you see God's intentionality in his creation—and in your own life?*

the biblical authors repeatedly make reference to God as creator. in doing so, they are affirming his power, his greatness, and his eternal sovereignty. **Lord over creation and Lord over all**, we serve a God who transcends both time and space, as well as our understanding.

- **job 38:4-11**
- **psalm 90:1-2**
- **isaiah 40:21-28**
- **isaiah 45:18**
- **jeremiah 32:17**
- **romans 1:19-20**

» *how have these verses increased your confidence in God's power and sovereignty?*

each of the first six days ends with the repeated refrain, "*and there was evening and there was morning.*" not so with the seventh day. on the seventh day of creation we are told that **God rested from his work**. not only did he rest from his work, he declared the seventh day holy—set apart from the other days.

he did not rest because he was tired or in need of a break; **God rested as both a pattern and an invitation** for us to cease from work and rest in him. unlike the first six days, God never declares the end of the seventh day. **we are to rest in him daily** as we await our seventh day rest of eternal life with him.

**so then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.**

**hebrews 4:9-10**

» *do you regularly find rest in God? how might you practice continually abiding in him?*

» *have you ever thought of eternity with God as a continuation of the seventh day of creation? how does this impact how you view eternity?*

fall

at the beginning of time, all of creation was absolutely perfect. there was no sickness or death or disaster or war, and adam and eve lived in unhindered intimacy with both God and each other. everything was perfectly good—but it didn't take long for perfection to be shattered by evil.

» **read genesis 3:1-15** and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a greater understanding of the severity of the fall.

there is an enemy. satan was once an angel who desired to usurp God's authority and become like God. in righteousness and justice, God cast him out of heaven; now satan lives with bloodthirsty disdain for God and us, his people—because we have been made in his image.

- isaiah 14:12-15
- ezekeiel 28:11-19
- luke 10:17-20
- revelation 12:7-12

just as he desired to become like God, satan now prowls around echoing the lie that humankind can become like God as well. he has been destined to hell, and he is determined to bring as many people with him as possible.

in the garden of eden, satan came as a serpent to deceive adam and eve. although eve was already made in God's image, **satan led her to believe there was more godlikeness to be had**—that God was actually holding out on them.

their entire existence thus far had been lived in the presence of God's goodness; **they had never known evil.** but satan, the deceiver, made evil look more appealing than obedience to God. eve, and adam along with her, took the bait. they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **they disobeyed God.**

» which of the enemy's lies do you struggle with most frequently?

» *in what sinful ways have you desired to be like God?*

in this one single act of disobedience to God, their relationship with both God and each other was fractured. **all of creation would now feel the effects of sin in the world.** death had entered into life's reality as a result of their first sin. all of humankind would now, for all generations, be marred with this sin nature.

humanity had fallen from perfect, intimate communion with their divine creator.

- genesis 3:23-24
- isaiah 59:1-13
- hosea 6:6-7
- ephesians 2:1-3

**the fall ruined everything.** God mercifully removed adam and eve from eden to prevent them from eating from the tree of life and, consequently, live in their sin forever. the garden of eden was now guarded by a flaming sword and cherubim with no hope for adam and eve to return—at least not on their own merit...

[illegible]

# redemption

the effects of the fall spread to every corner of the earth. a gaping chasm now existed between the creator and his creation. as a result of the fall, **we became a race of people who are persistently against God**. the separation was so great and the sin so all-consuming that, left to ourselves, we could never again even desire relationship with God.

**we could never save ourselves...**

- **genesis 6:5**
- **jeremiah 17:5,9**
- **ephesians 2:12**
- **ephesians 4:18**

**...we needed a redeemer.**

God was not surprised by adam and eve's sin. he already had a plan for redemption in place. following their disobedience, clothed in their garments of shame, **they heard the first whisper of hope—the first glimpse of the gospel**. God declared that satan would not get the last word—there would be a son who would crush the head of the enemy.

**“i will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”**

**genesis 3:15 (NIV)**

the entire old testament weaves together the story of God's people with the repeated promise that a day was coming when his son, the messiah, would make everything right and **the people of God could once again be with God**.

- **job 19:23-27**
- **micah 5:2-4**
- **isaiah 7:14**
- **isaiah 9:2-7**
- **daniel 7:13-14**
- **zechariah 9:9-10**

» *imagine being an old testament believer awaiting the fulfillment of God's promised son. how do you think this waiting might have impacted your faith?*

» *how does recognizing the complexity of their hope-filled longing encourage you right now as you wait on the Lord?*

- **habakkuk 2:3**
- **2 peter 3:9**

finally, after centuries of waiting—at long last—**the promised son was born**. Jesus, immanuel, had come in the flesh to be God with us and save us from our sins. he lived the perfectly holy life we could never live and died the death that we deserved in order to make us right with God. he then rose from the dead so that we can be with God forever. Christ paid the penalty for our disobedience to God and set us free from slavery to sin.

**he is our redeemer—and we are the redeemed.**

- **leviticus 17:11**
- **isaiah 61:1-3**
- **john 8:34-36**
- **romans 6:3-23**
- **colossians 1:13-14**
- **hebrews 9:11-12**

if this were a map, there might be a star indicating *you are here*. the story of the bible is not over: we are still living in the time of redemption. **Christ is still redeeming his people**.

# restoration

the world, as it was created, has been fractured and marred by the curse of sin. what God created in perfection, evil has broken. God created us for intimacy with him; sin shattered that relationship and brought with it death. Christ has redeemed his people from the clutches of darkness, **but for now he leaves us here to be his light** to those around us still enslaved to sin. in our in-between existence, we live with an ever-increasing awareness of the brokenness that surrounds us.

- **genesis 3:16-19**
- **romans 8:19-25**
- **2 corinthians 5:1-4**
- **2 timothy 3:1-7**

» *where do you see the effects of sin in your life and the world around you?*

» *in what ways do you feel the tension of living in the already-and-not-yet of your redemption?*

**the darkness will not last.** much like the old testament believers, we are journeying towards our promised land. one day Jesus will return and wipe away all darkness, and he will be for us our eternal light in the new jerusalem.

- **john 1:4-5**
- **john 14:2-3**
- **acts 1:6-11**
- **1 corinthians 15:50-58**
- **hebrews 11:13-16**
- **revelation 22:1-5**

it will not always be like this. the brokenness and sin and turmoil and pain all have an end date. **Jesus is coming back.** he has promised he will return for his own as a bridegroom for his bride. God has promised to dwell with his people for all eternity. in the restoration of all things, **the earth and everything in it will be made new.**

- **2 corinthians 5:17**
- **1 john 3:2**
- **revelation 19:1-16**

**and i heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”**

**revelation 21:3**

» *read revelation 21:1-27 and contemplate the beauty of our future hope.*

on that great day when Christ returns for his bride—the church—we will exhale into eternity, stand before our king in our glorified bodies, and see our savior face-to-face as we fall to our knees in worship.

**“come, Lord Jesus!”** (revelation 22:20)

» *as you contemplate the hope of the new creation, what is the response of your heart and soul?*

» *how has reading about the story of scripture given you a greater understanding of the continuity of the whole bible?*

**now what?**

## now what?

therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,  
rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught,  
abounding in thanksgiving. —colossians 2:6-7

by now you have spent numerous hours pouring over scriptures and delving deeper into the beautiful truths we hold so closely as dearly-loved followers of Christ. meeting with the Lord, learning in community, and enjoying the fruitful conversations of discipleship will have lasting benefits in your own growth and the growth of others.

**but...now what? where do we go from here?**

whether people realize it or not, everyone operates out of what they think and believe is true about God. in short, **every person has a theology—a belief system about God.** the only question is: what informs that theology? as we study God through his word, as we let his word shape our thoughts and beliefs about him, we will inevitably love him more. **right theology will always lead to worship.**

this journey through *foundations* has been paved with theological matters of first importance. however, if you have simply learned theology but have not been equipped to walk it out, then this has been just another study that ends on itself. **from the beginning, the goal has not only been to grow in knowledge, but also to grow in intimacy with the Lord.** let this resource be a blip on the timeline of your walk with God, but let your life be defined by love for God, love for others, and love for his word. it is to be our daily bread.

and this is the testimony,  
that God gave us eternal  
life, and this life is in his  
son. **whoever has the son  
has life; whoever does  
not have the son of  
God does not have life.**

## 1 john 5:11-12

Jesus commands, “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,*” and, “*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (mark 12:28-31).

## so how do we walk in obedience to these commands?

- **we grow in our love for God** as we grow in our knowledge of him; we know him by learning his word and seeing how he reveals himself in it.
- **we live out our love for God** by living a life of joyful obedience and living in community with his people - the church.
- **we love our neighbors** by loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, by serving and sharing our faith with others, and by following Christ's call to make disciples of all nations.

» *as you continue to grow in obedience to the Lord's commands, who could you consider discipling?*

» *in light of what we have learned and how we have grown, how then are we to live our lives?*

the next few pages offer an overview of what the bible has to say regarding different areas of both our individual lives and our lives together as the family of God.

feel free to **cover a handful at a time** or **focus on the topics with which you are least familiar**; the pace and the depth at which you dive into these is completely up to you.

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*therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ  
and go on to maturity...*



# living as a child of God

being united to Christ changes us. he both frees us and empowers us to live a life of holiness as new creations and ambassadors for him.

**the gospel changes everything...especially us.** when we surrender our lives to Christ, there is a transfer of ownership: our lives are no longer our own and so the rhythms of our lives will necessarily change. these changes will not come by heavy-handed, legalistic rule, but rather by **our own desires being transformed** more and more to look like those of Christ who is in us—and we in him.

## confession

although we are made clean in Christ, we will continue to struggle with sin in this life. **we are forgiven for all eternity because of Jesus, but we are not yet perfected.** our life in Christ is a constant battle between our sinful nature and the Spirit inside us, and our disobedience creates relational distance between us and God. we remain forever his child but the fellowship between us is hindered.

**unconfessed sin causes us to feel distant from God.** confession of sin will need to become the pattern of our lives as we seek to live in joyful fellowship with the triune God. we cannot allow shame to keep us from confession; instead, as the Holy Spirit convicts us of wrongdoing, we can be quick to admit it and have our fellowship with him restored. we who have tasted his kindness and grace can eagerly run to him with our sin because we know he has already forgiven us.

- psalm 32:5
- hebrews 4:16
- proverbs 28:13-14
- 1 john 1:5-10

» *how difficult is it for you to go to Jesus with your sin?*

## repentance

as vital as confession is to our life in Christ, we cannot simply confess our sin and then continue to live our lives unchanged. **we must also turn from our sin and walk in repentance.** as we live in relationship with God, we repent when the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts by making us aware of our sin. repentance is literally turning away from our sin and turning to God.

to be clear: **this is not a call to try harder or do better.** we cannot walk away from our sin in our own power; we need to **ask the Holy Spirit to help us hate our sin** like God does and walk in the holiness which is ours in Christ. although we may continue to stumble in our repentance, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can find freedom from even our most besetting sins. “*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*” (2 corinthians 3:17).

- psalm 51:1-12
- acts 3:19-20
- luke 15:3-7
- 2 corinthians 7:8-10

» *from what sins do you need to repent? confess your sin to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the desire and power to live freed from that sin.*

## forgiveness

because we are in Christ, God does not hold our sin against us or have any contempt for us.

in similar fashion, we need to forgive ourselves, confess our sins to one another for accountability, and ask for forgiveness when we sin against others. **confession, repentance, and forgiveness foster restored relationships and keep bitterness at bay.**

as people who have been fully forgiven by God in Christ, we too are to offer forgiveness to those who sin against us. this is not something we can do on our power, but God empowers us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

we are commanded to forgive because harboring unforgiveness can lead to hatred towards fellow image bearers of God. **forgiving others is just as much for us as it is for them.**

- matthew 18:21-35
- romans 4:7-8
- ephesians 4:25-32
- colossians 3:12-17

» *who do you need to forgive, and whose forgiveness do you need to seek?*

## communicating with God

any good relationship requires frequent communication to maintain intimacy; our relationship with God is no different. ongoing communication with the Lord involves reading what he says to us in his word, talking with him in prayer, and slowing down while doing both to listen for his voice.

**my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.**

**john 10:27**

when we read his word, we let scripture inform our prayers to him and listen for his response which will never contradict his word. **the more we dialogue with God, the more we will come to know and love his voice.**

regularly talking with God and abiding in his word will change who we are, how we act, how we think, and how we speak as we grow in relationship with him.

- psalm 119:18-20
- matthew 6:5-13
- john 8:31-32
- john 10:1-16

» *in what ways do you need the Lord to help you grow in communicating with him?*

“if you are a child of God, you don’t lose your status if you have a bad week.”  
—tim keller

## gratitude & praise

cultivating a life of gratitude and praise changes us even in the most difficult times.

if we focus on ourselves and our circumstances, we see nothing but our own sinfulness and despair. but when we choose to **fix our eyes on the triune God** and thank him for who he is and all the joys he's given us, we will find our sorrow lifting as we speak words of praise and gratitude to him. his love and provision are greater than our pains. we praise him for who he is and he sustains us in him.

sing praises to the  
Lord, o you his saints,  
and give thanks to  
his holy name.

psalm 30:4

when Christ is our focus, we live every moment more aware of the presence of God and even the mundane becomes worship. we praise God, not because he needs our praise, but because we have been created to worship. **when we behold his holiness and splendor, we can't *not* worship.**

- 2 samuel 7:18-25
- psalm 138:1-8
- 1 thessalonians 5:16-18
- hebrews 12:28

» *what can you praise the Lord for regarding who he is and what he has done for you?*

## sharing your story

*and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked [...]*  
**but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. —ephesians 2:1, 4-5**

in the greek, the original language of the new testament, the word for *gospel* is *euangelion* which means “*good news*.” this greek word is where we get the english word *evangelism*. evangelism is simply sharing with others the gospel—the good news of who Jesus is and all that he has accomplished in reconciling us to God through the power of the Holy Spirit. **we have been brought from death to life and have been united to Christ. this is good news worth sharing!**

the gospel has forever changed our lives; we are free from the power of sin and death, and we are promised eternity with our savior. **the redemption story forever remains the same**, but the specific ways the gospel has transformed our lives is different for each one of us. the power of the gospel in our lives is the story we have to tell and the one others need to hear. it is in joyful obedience that we get to share the good news of the gospel to the lost world around us—**it is the most important story we could ever tell!**

- acts 1:8
- acts 13:47-49
- acts 20:24
- philemon 1:4-7

» *think about how you first came to Christ and consider the ways he is currently working in your life. write out your story and then pray for opportunities to share it with others.*

# living in the family of God

now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

## 1 corinthians 12:27

we have been united to Christ, but not only that, we have also been united to one another through the one Spirit who lives in each of us as believers in Christ. even though we are each individually united to Christ and uniquely gifted by the Spirit, **we are to live and operate as the single body of Christ—the church.** we not only need Jesus, but God has created us to need each other as well. it is not good for us to live this life of faith alone.

the church—the bride of Christ and family of God—exists to encourage, teach, challenge, correct, and love his people towards holiness and Christ-likeness. she is also called to demonstrate the love of Christ in service to others. as the church, **we are to display the beauty of Christ in our unified pursuit of the heart of God.**

## family

the triune God has eternally existed in holy fellowship; he desires the same for us, his people. God has not simply called individuals to himself—**but he has called us individually to be a part of his royal family in Jesus.** with God as our father, we are brothers and sisters of Christ. this also makes us brothers and sisters of one another *in* Christ.

so then you are no longer  
strangers and aliens, but  
you are fellow citizens with  
the saints and members of  
the household of God.

## ephesians 2:19

in the creation account, before God forms eve, he says, “*it is not good that the man should be alone*” (genesis 2:18). although this passage is most often quoted in reference to marriage, it is equally true for the family of God as a whole. **we need each other**, both brothers and sisters, to be the fullness of the body of Christ in this world.

- matthew 12:46-50
- john 20:17-18

- 1 corinthians 12:12-13
- 1 timothy 3:14-15

» *how might seeing other believers as brothers and sisters change how we relate to them?*

## spiritual gifts

at the moment of salvation, we are sealed for eternity by the Holy Spirit who also gives us spiritual gifts. we are **each uniquely gifted and equipped** for the work and life of faith to which we have been called—and for which we have been saved. these gifts are given for the benefit of the church so that the people of God are encouraged and equipped, and most importantly, Christ is glorified.

Christ is the head and we are all members of his body—this means there is no hierarchy of believers. no single person is most important, and no single person is expendable. **all are necessary and equally valued in the body of Christ.**

there are a variety of gifts and not one of them should be looked down upon as less important than any other. **the Spirit produces gifts in each person as he chooses**, intentionally. no gift is meant to be hoarded or flaunted; every gift should be exercised with love for our brothers and sisters, and for the unity of the church.

so, if our spiritual gifts are vital to the church, how do we find out what they are if we are unsure? first and foremost, **ask the gift giver himself!** pray that the Holy Spirit would reveal the areas where he has uniquely equipped you to serve God and the church.

- romans 12:3-8
- 1 corinthians 12:4-11
- ephesians 4:11-16
- 1 peter 4:8-11

» *where do you see your passions and abilities converging for the good of the church and the glory of God?*

» *what are you already doing for the common good, or what do you frequently find yourself compelled to do?*

## serving

God’s love for his children is deeper than we can fathom. he desires for us to share his heart for his children by serving one another. he cares for each of us personally, and **often he cares for those in his body through the hands and hearts of us, his children.** when we serve our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are serving God, too.

as each has  
received a gift,  
use it to serve one  
another, as good  
stewards of God’s  
varied grace

## 1 peter 4:10

the son of God became incarnate, in part, to show the world who God is. we too, as the body of Christ, are to **show Christ to the world in how we live and love and serve.** the eternal perspective God has given us as his children enables us not to live for ourselves but to live to serve those around us. the grace and love which God continually pours into our hearts as we abide in Jesus overflows into a fountain of grace and love to the people God brings into our lives.

when we see the array of pain and suffering in this world, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the weight of it all.

it is not possible for one person to provide for all the needs or comfort all the hurts or help all the people; **it takes an army of individuals to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this broken world.** we need each other because the world needs us—together.

- matthew 20:25-28
- matthew 25:35-40
- john 13:12-17
- james 2:14-17

» *when have you seen the heart of God displayed through an act of service?*

“the doctrine of salvation declares the good news that we belong to God. the doctrine of the church declares the good news that we belong to one another.”  
—jen wilkin & j.t. english

## giving

Jesus gave everything, including his very life, in order to reconcile us to God. as his disciples, we get to reflect that same selfless heart. we have been so richly blessed in Christ; regardless of how much or how little we have in the here and now, **in humility we surrender all that is ours to God and his purposes.**

God does not need our money, but he is a generous giver and desires for us to be as well. **he has called us to mirror his generous heart** by gladly supporting the church and the ministries he uses to serve so many. when we think of all that God has given us, it becomes our joyful response to give and support our local church and the work God is doing in and through it.

- malachi 3:8-10
- luke 12:32-34

- 2 corinthians 9:6-15
- 1 timothy 6:17-19

» do you find it difficult to give? why or why not?

## worship

worship should be woven into every facet of the life of the church. we worship as we sing, collectively lifting our voices and hearts to our king; **we also worship as we pray together, learn together, and serve together.**

the Spirit inside us compels our hearts and minds to worship the only one who is worthy of all adoration. **ultimately, we worship because he is worthy** and, in fact, we have been created for that very purpose.

- john 4:21-24
- acts 2:42-47

- hebrews 10:19-25
- 1 peter 2:9-10

## baptism & communion

baptism and communion are the two ordinances instituted by Jesus that we are to do as acts of worship in obedience to him.

we don't *become* God's children through the symbol of baptism; rather, in the obedient act of baptism we are declaring that we already *are*.

in taking communion, we declare our trust in and reliance upon Christ and his sacrifice for the atonement of our sins and the salvation of our souls. we put to death any inclination to live a "Jesus plus \_\_\_\_" life: neither Jesus plus good works nor Jesus plus baptism can save us.

**both baptism and communion are meant to retell and declare the gospel story.**

Christ alone makes us holy; it is by Christ's blood alone that we are cleansed from our sins and made right with God. we are to be faithful to proclaim his atoning death and resurrection until he returns in these acts of worship!

- matthew 3:13-17
- luke 22:14-20

- romans 6:1-4
- 1 corinthians 11:23-26

» what questions do you have about baptism and communion?

## elders

in order to lead the church in these acts of worship, God, in his wisdom, has given his church pastors and elders, not as dictators and rulers, but **as shepherds to guide and care for God's people.** God gives specific guidelines in scripture for who is qualified for this weighty role and calling. their responsibility is great; our responsibility is to respect, honor, support, and pray for them.

- 1 tim. 3:1-7
- titus 1:5-11
- hebrews 13:17
- 1 peter 5:1-5

and i will give you **shepherds after my own heart**, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

**jeremiah 3:15**

» according to these scriptures, what does God require of elders—both as qualifications and responsibilities?

## mission

the mission of the church, indeed the goal of every believer, should be to know God and make him known. **this mission is both local and far-reaching—across the street and across the globe.**

Jesus came as God in the flesh to make God known to the world he so loves. he still desires to make himself known through his children—the church. shortly before Jesus returned to heaven, he gave his disciples the enormous task of making more disciples by teaching the whole world about him.

as disciples of Jesus, we get to know, follow, and enjoy him both here and for eternity. **discipleship is a life-long endeavor** in which we not only grow in our knowledge and affections for Christ, but we get to invite others to join us in following him as well. the command Jesus gave his disciples is the command he still gives us today—**the mission has not changed.**

» why is discipleship the critical mission of the church?

» where is God calling you to join him in the mission of discipleship?

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*Jesus came and said to them, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that i have commanded you. and behold, i am with you always, to the end of the age."*

**matthew 28:18-20**

# studying the bible

*for ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it. —ezra 7:10*

the bible is living and active and reveals to us what can be known about God. we don't simply read the bible—we **get to enjoy God by meeting with him in his word**. we study and consume it as our daily sustenance.

as we come to the bible, we must always remember that it is a book written *by* God and *about* God. **we see ourselves more truly as we see him more fully**. with that in mind, when we read, we ask ourselves first “*what does this say about God?*” before we ever begin to consider “*what does this say about me?*”

## so how do we study God's word?

there are many different ways to approach the study of a book or passage of the bible, and it can be tempting to overcomplicate it. one simplified way is to focus on answering three questions using the acronym:

### O-U-R observe • understand • respond

taking notes, underlining, and highlighting while reading increases critical thinking, recall, and engagement with the text. to this end, it is helpful to print out the book or passage, double-spaced—this leaves ample room for writing comments and questions as well.

## observe—what did the author say?

it is highly beneficial to first read through an entire book or passage of the bible to get the overall view of what's being communicated.

we see and understand scripture more clearly when we first **take time to discover the basic context** for the book or passage. study bibles and commentaries are useful in helping us gather background information:

- **who:** who wrote the book and what is their background? who was the original audience?
- **when:** when in human history was it written? what was happening at this point in history?
- **where:** where in the world was it written?
- **why:** why was it written? what were the particular circumstances surrounding the author and audience at this time?

after we lay this groundwork, we are then ready to observe the text by reading it repetitively, out loud, in a variety of translations, over time, while noting or highlighting details:

- **words:** what specific words and phrases does the author use intentionally or repeatedly?
- **actions:** who is doing what; where and how are they doing it?
- **context:** how does this passage fit with the surrounding verses and with the story of the bible as a whole?
- **characters:** how is God and each person named and described?

## understand—what did the passage mean to the original audience?

read slowly and ask the Spirit to guide your understanding. when we **read a passage carefully and repeatedly**, we see significant details intentionally recorded in scripture that we might otherwise miss.

every passage of scripture had to mean something to the original audience before it could ever mean something to us. it is important to **make an effort to understand the author's original audience and intent**. in doing so, we will comprehend the scripture more fully and avoid unintentionally taking a verse or passage out of context.

- *what conclusions can you draw from what you have observed?*
- *what did this message mean to its original audience?*

after spending considerable time in the text, evaluate your conclusions and gather insights by using tools outside of the text:

- **cross references:** scripture helps interpret scripture. a study bible or bible app can give additional passages to consider that are related to the passage being studied.
- **word meanings:** grasping the wider meaning—or possible other meanings—for original words can help with understanding the passage more fully.
- **commentaries:** find reliable commentaries by trusted authors to help with your understanding.

**every time we read the bible, we build upon truths we have learned** and ideas he has shown us. like anything else, the more we study God's word, the more it becomes second nature to see the character of God and the unity of his word on every page.

## respond—how will i respond to what i read and understood?

- **worship:** *what has this shown me about God's character and the gospel?* the whole bible is pointing us to God, so we want worship to be our first response.
- **meditate:** *what verse or verses can i commit to memory and continue to reflect on this week?*
- **follow:** *in what ways is God calling me to follow him in obedience as a response to what i have seen in scripture? where is he calling me to repent?*

## now what?

now that you have seen a framework for how to study the bible, the best way to grasp what you have learned is to apply it as you read the word—**choose a book of the bible to walk through together**, utilizing this study process. as you grow in your confidence to study God's word and your enjoyment of meeting with him there, he will equip you to help others do the same. this is the call and pattern of discipleship:

**for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

ephesians 2:10

**love God, love others, and be a disciple who makes disciples for the rest of your days.**

## helpful outside resources

- **bibleproject.com**: short videos explaining books and passages in scripture
- **blueletterbible.org**: commentaries, background information, original language
- **esv.org**: in-text cross references
- **gotquestions.org**: commentary in a q & a format
- **ligonier.com**: commentaries and sermons by scripture reference or by topic
- **matthiaslot.com/sermons**: compilation of sermons over many books of the bible
- **netbible.org**: translation notes and commentary

## final thoughts

throughout this journey, you have spent valuable time with God in hundreds of passages spanning over 50 books of the bible. as you **continue to abide in his word**, he will continue to make you increasingly confident in your faith and better equipped to study the bible on your own.

he has created us to know and love him and then make him known. **we have the word of God and the Holy Spirit**—therefore, we have all we need to follow Christ's command to make disciples.

**being a disciple is a call to keep learning.** we can never learn all there is to know about God and his word, nor does he expect us to. he simply calls us to a humble dependence on him and a willingness to share what we've learned so others can come to know and love Jesus and walk in his ways.

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*come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,  
and i will give you rest. **take my yoke upon you, and  
learn from me, for i am gentle and lowly in heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.***

**matthew 11:28-29**





loving him  
& loving his.