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# NEW LIFE NEW START



**Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

## WELCOME

### **Welcome to the Christian family!**

Let me begin by congratulating you on your decision to give your life to Jesus Christ. Millions of other Christians (now your brothers and sisters) will agree with me, I know, when I say that you have made the greatest and most wonderful decision of your life.

It is important now however, for you to understand how to move on in the Christian life. This is why this 'New Christians' Course is so important.

Becoming a Christian is the start of a brand new life and there is a lot to learn. This course aims to lead you and help you understand the things that Christians must do in order to grow and become true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many exciting and wonderful discoveries ahead of you in the Christian life, but you will discover nothing greater than this - that a Christian is a person in whom Christ lives. Just think of it - Christ is living and present in you right now. And His promise is that He will never fail or forsake you (NT) Hebrews 13:5.

This course will not cover everything involved in being a Christian, something which is impossible to do. In addition to what you are going to learn here, there are many other truths you will learn as you walk the Christian path. We are all still discovering truths, both about ourselves and about God - it's a life-long and life-filling journey.

The purpose of this course is to highlight some of the basic steps involved in being a Christian and to lay a foundation that will enable you to grow in your relationship with Christ.

May God bless you greatly as you learn the steps involved in becoming a strong and vigorous disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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# IMPORTANT INFORMATION

## HOW TO USE THIS COURSE

### **One to one**

Ideally this course will be used on a one to one basis. For this to occur we will suggest a friend to go through the course with you. This friend will walk alongside you and be there to help you.

### **In a Group**

This course can also be used in a group with someone who is spiritually mature leading the discussions. In a group there can often be some great discussions - although it does effect the one to one honesty you'd get doing this with just your appointed friend.

### **On your own**

It is possible however to work through this course alone. This certainly is not the best way for the new Christian to use this course as there may be things they will not understand without the explanation and help of a mature Christian. It helps to have someone available to answer questions that arise.

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

### **A BIBLE**

You will need a Bible with good, clear and easy to read print. I would suggest you use the English Standard Version. This popular version is the one which this course will mainly use so it will help you follow along.

### **A PEN AND PAPER**

As we/you go through each section there will be parts we/you will fill in. It may also be helpful to have a notepad for you to jot down anything you may want to discuss at a later stage.

## WHAT TO DO

### **PRAY**

Ask God to help you understand the basic steps this course will take you through.

### **READ**

Read the Bible verses the sections point you to.

### **THINK**

Think about what you have read and what it means to you.

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## **HOW TO FIND A BIBLE VERSE**

Here is an example to help you understand how to find a Bible verse.

The Bible verse we will use as an example is - **(NT) 1 John 5:11-12**.

- **(NT)** means the book is in the New Testament part of the Bible. **(OT)** would mean you should look in the Old Testament.
- **1 John** refers to the book.
- **5** is the chapter. Each book is divided into parts called 'chapters'. This number tells you which chapter to look at.
- **11-12** are the verses. Each chapter is divided into parts called verses which are also numbered. These numbers tell you which verse/s to read. The dash means you should read all the verses from the first number to the second.

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# 1: BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

*Acts 2:38*

*'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

The reason you are going through this course is because you have made a decision to follow Jesus. You have already become a Christian. But nevertheless, it's good to start with an understanding of that decision you have made and looking at what it means.

The most important thing in the world is for you to know God in a personal way. In other words, you need to be a Christian. It's the most important thing that can happen to any person.

But what does this exactly mean? Many people have some funny ideas about what Christianity is and how one becomes one. It's vitally important that we understand what this means. Because this is so important our first subject will deal with this basic question. So, how does one become a Christian? To find the answer to this question we need to see what the Bible - which is our authority for everything, has to say about it.

## **Becoming a Christian - What it doesn't mean**

Here are a number of false views that some hold regarding Christianity. All of them are incorrect. You are not a Christian because you:-

- Live a good life.
- Give to charity.
- Go to church.
- Read the Bible.
- Have been baptised or christened.
- Were brought up in a Christian home
- Believe there is a God.

## **Becoming a Christian - What it does mean**

Becoming a Christian can be defined in different ways. Here are some of them.

Becoming a Christian is:-

- Discovering that God really does love you.
- Accepting Jesus Christ as your Saviour.
- Being 'born again.'
- Putting your faith in Jesus and making Him Lord of your life.
- Becoming part of a new family - with God as father and many brothers and sisters.
- Asking God's forgiveness and following Jesus, doing what He wants, not what you want.

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## **Why is it necessary to become a Christian?**

It doesn't take anyone very long to realise that the world is not a perfect place populated by perfect people. Our jails are filled with people who have done all kinds of wrong.

But imperfect people are not just found in our jails, imperfect people are found everywhere. We are all imperfect, we all do wrong, none of us are perfect, or good. Even a baby has a tendency to do wrong, that is why we try and teach them to do good. There is obviously a problem somewhere.

## **The Problem**

Many people don't know God or don't believe in Him. That doesn't stop Him existing.

The problem is, there's a gap between God and people. It's a twofold gap. First, God is infinitely great, while we're so small. And, second, God is totally pure, while we are not. So what's gone wrong? Why do people do wrong? What has caused this gap, this separation between God and man?

THE BIBLE GIVES THE ANSWER IN ONE SHORT WORD, SIN! God has given every person a choice, we can either please ourselves and go our own way, or we can please God.

We have chosen to go our own way. When we do, we sin. (NT) Romans 3:23, tells us that, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'.

## **SIN IS A PERSON GOING HIS OWN WAY INSTEAD OF GOD'S**

It's a bit like a car with a faulty braking system. When you apply the brakes, instead of going straight, the car pulls to one side. If you don't get it fixed it could land you in trouble.

## **SIN IS THE TENDENCY WE HAVE TO DO WRONG**

Have you ever felt like doing wrong, even though you know you should do right? Even the Apostle Paul experienced this. Turn in your Bible and let's see what he said about this in (NT) Romans 7:18-19.

In (NT) 1 John 3:4 we are told, 'Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness'.

## **SIN IS BREAKING GOD'S LAW**

In our land, laws have been established. They are there for the safety and well being of society. If we break and disobey the laws of the land, we will be punished. The Bible tells us what God's laws are, what we are to do and what we aren't to do. When we break these laws we sin.

## **WE SIN IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS**

Sin can be committed in various and different ways, but whatever it is, it is either committed with our Words, with our Actions, or with our Thoughts. The things we say, the things we do and the things we think about are what causes us to go our own way, instead of God's, to do wrong and break God's law.

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT IS?**

Read (NT) Mark 12:28-31

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“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”. The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. There is no other commandment greater than these”.

IN OTHER WORDS, LOVE GOD WITH EVERYTHING YOU’VE GOT. Have you ever done that?

## **SIN SEPARATES YOU FROM GOD**

(OT) Isa 59:2 It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

Sin separates you from God **NOW**. Because of sin, we cannot have a relationship with God. He is pure, we are sinful, these two can never meet. If we are to have a relationship with God the problem of sin in our lives must be solved.

Sin can separate you from God **FOREVER**.

(NT) 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that, ‘We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad’.

(NT) Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is not just a BODILY DEATH we all face, but a SPIRITUAL and ETERNAL DEATH that separates a person from God forever - the Bible calls this HELL.

## **How can this problem be solved?**

How can this gap problem between God and man, caused by sin, be solved? How can this gap be bridged, so that people can become Christians? Well it is:

- Not by being born in a so called ‘Christian’ country.

You may be born in a garage, but it doesn’t make you a car! The only ‘country’ we are born into, spiritually speaking, is Satan’s kingdom, the ‘dominion of darkness’. (NT) Colossians 1:13.

- Not by having Christian parents.

Even though Christian parents can be a great help, spiritual life is, ‘not of natural descent’.

(NT) John 1:13. One person put it very well when they said ‘God has many Children - but He has no Grandchildren.’ Our faith must stand up on its own.

- Not by doing your best and living a good life, commendable though that is.

God says that salvation is ‘not by works’. (NT) Ephesians 2:8-9

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- Not by being christened or baptised as a baby.

The Bible knows nothing of this traditional practice, and the Bible is our guide.

### **This problem can only be solved by accepting GOD'S ANSWER**

The GOOD News is that Jesus Christ died and rose again to deal with the problem of sin - through Him it is possible to have forgiveness, a new life and a wonderful future.

This is a spiritual encounter with Jesus Christ and it gives us the power to live the way God wants. It makes it possible for a relationship with God to take place, for this gap problem to be solved, for the sin that separates us from God to be removed. Some people refer to this as 'being saved', 'getting converted' or being 'born again', or one of the other descriptions we looked at earlier. To have such an experience is the most vital thing in the world for you as an individual.

### **God's answer is JESUS**

(NT) John 14:6 Jesus told him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.'

(NT) Acts 4:12 There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

From (NT) Romans 5:8 we are told that 'God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

(NT) 1 Peter 2:24 He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.

Jesus is the Son of God, Himself Divine. He left the Father's side in heaven and became a human being like us, though without sin.

During His earthly life He did meet God's standards. He offered Himself on the cross as a sacrifice, taking the punishment that your sin deserved. He was raised from the dead and ascended back to the Father. Jesus is the only perfect, sinless person who has ever lived.

He is the only person who could die in our place as a substitute to take the punishment for our sins. He was separated from God on our behalf so that our relationship with God can be restored. He suffered as He took our sins away.

So Jesus through His death and resurrection has made it possible for man to be forgiven and have a relationship with God. But just knowing this is not enough. For this to become a reality we have to do a number of things.

We have to respond to this fact in three particular ways. IF A PERSON WANTS TO BE FORGIVEN AND TO KNOW PEACE WITH GOD, THESE STEPS ARE A MUST!



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In (NT) Acts 20:21 Paul states that people must do two things. They must repent and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **We must REPENT**

By nature and practice we are all sinners in God's eyes. That doesn't mean you have necessarily committed gross crimes, it just means that you fall short of God's standards. To repent is to say sorry to God for the wrong thoughts, words and actions you have done.

But repentance also means that you are going to change the way you live. True repentance is a decision to start to live differently and instead of going your own way, you will now live for God, following Him and obeying His commands. To repent is to admit your sin and determine, with God's help, to turn your back on it. It involves your mind, your emotions and your actions.

### **REPENTANCE IS A CHANGE OF MIND**

There must be a change of mind about the way you have been living. You need to admit that you have been living in the wrong way and for the wrong things. You have been on a road that has led you away from God. No longer will you make excuses like, 'It's the way I was brought up', or, 'I inherited my foul temper from my dad.' Instead, you'll say, 'It's my responsibility alone, and I've been wrong to act that way.'

### **REPENTANCE IS A CHANGE OF HEART**

There must be a change of heart. Repentance means saying sorry to God and really meaning it! If you truly repent there will be genuine sorrow for your sins as you realise it was these that sent Jesus to the cross of Calvary. In (NT) Acts 2:37 we see how the people reacted to hearing this news from Peter.

(NT) Acts 2:37 Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?'

### **REPENTANCE IS A CHANGE OF DIRECTION**

You must be willing, with God's help to turn from everything you know to be wrong. You'll actually stop doing what the Bible shows you to be wrong. This may include a habit, an immoral relationship, a friendship, a book or magazine, no longer stealing stationary from the office, asking forgiveness for your bitter attitude, etc.

(NT) Matthew 3:8-9 Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. In (NT) Acts 26:20 Paul told the people when he was preaching, 'they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.'

In other words, you must prove and show your sincerity by turning from sin and living differently, even putting things right if and where you can.

## **We must put our faith in Jesus and BELIEVE**

Believing is having faith in what God has done for you in sending Jesus to die for your sins. True faith is not simply believing something in your head, it also affects your life, the way you live.

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True faith leads to ACTION! It means giving your life to Jesus.

When you sit on a chair you believe it will support you. If you didn't believe this, you wouldn't sit down on it. Believing in Jesus is the same. When you sit down on a chair you put your whole weight in the chair, knowing it will not let you down. Believing in Jesus is putting your whole weight on Jesus, trusting Him to support you. But He can only support you when you give your life to Him. If you do He won't let you down.

Other than (NT) Acts 2:20 there are many verses that tell us we must believe. Let me highlight one more. In (NT) Acts 16:30-32, Paul and Silas said to the jailor when he asked, 'what must I do to be saved?'

(NT) Acts 16:31 They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.'

### **We must ACCEPT – RECEIVE the GIFT**

God has provided for us salvation; he has made it possible for us to have a relationship with God. As we've already seen (NT) Romans 6:23 tell us that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A gift doesn't actually become yours until you reach out and take it from the person who's offering it to you. The wonderful gift of knowing God isn't a physical thing, rather it's a spiritual thing and must be taken, accepted and received by faith.

A person receives this gift when they repent and believe and ask God to accept them. Receiving is inviting Jesus to be your new boss (Lord), and your guide. Think of your life as a house.

By receiving Jesus, you are inviting Him into all the rooms - all areas of your life. Becoming a Christian is allowing Christ to rule, to be in charge of your life, it is submitting your life totally to Jesus as your Lord and boss.

In (NT) Romans 10:9-10 we read: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.

### **IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE SO ALREADY OR YOU ARE UNSURE, YOU COULD GIVE YOUR LIFE TO JESUS CHRIST RIGHT NOW AND BECOME A CHRISTIAN TODAY.**

He loves you so much and He's ready to receive you today, right now. If you haven't done so already or you are unsure, and you want to become a Christian and accept God's gift of salvation, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, why not talk to Him (pray) now.

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Here is a sample of a prayer you could pray:

*Lord Jesus Christ,*

*I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. I ask your forgiveness. Thank you for dying on the cross for me to set me free from my sins. Please come into my life and fill me with your Holy Spirit and be with me forever. I want to make you my Lord from this day forward.*

*Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen.*

If you have already done this - I hope today has helped clarify that decision you have already made.

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## 2: Assurance – Can you be sure?

*1 John 5:11-13*

*'And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.'*

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a new life, something the Bible calls “being born again.” When a baby is born it needs to grow, learn and get to know its parents and become part of the family. In the same way as a ‘new born’ Christian you also need to grow, learn and get to know your heavenly Father and become part of your new spiritual family.

### **New Life - New Start**

One of the problems that some Christians struggle with is in the area of assurance - they hope that their sins are forgiven and that they are on their way to heaven, but they're not really sure about it.

So can you be sure that God has accepted you? The answer is a very definite yes! Indeed, it is very important that every Christian understands that God has accepted them. Unless you fully understand this you will struggle to become the strong and secure Christian God wants you to be.

You can't relax your full weight into a chair if you're not confident it is strong enough to bear your weight. Neither can you relax fully into your relationship with God if you're not certain that He has accepted you.

### **SO HOW AND WHY CAN YOU BE SURE THAT GOD HAS ACCEPTED YOU?**

**God has given us three main means for assurance.**

#### **1. THE CLEAR TEACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD**

(NT)1 John 5:11-13 and this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. 13 I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.

If you have given yourself fully to Jesus Christ by believing and asking Him to be your Lord and Saviour then you 'have' the Son of God and you can be certain (know) that Jesus has accepted you and you have eternal life. For the person who does this JESUS HAS PROMISED TO ACCEPT YOU!

In (NT) John 6:37 Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me, and whoever comes to me I will NEVER drive away.”

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When you accepted Christ you came to Him, so you can rest assured that He will hold on to you and never reject you.

(NT) John 1:12-13 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

When you receive Jesus, you become a member of God's family!

(NT) John 6:47 'I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life'.

Eternal life is a different kind of life that begins the moment you give yourself to Jesus. It is life with a new meaning, a new power and a new purpose.

In (OT) Isaiah 43:25 God says, 'I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, and remembers your sins no more.'

God chooses not to remember our sins any more

When God forgives us, He forgets our sins and does not hold them against us in the future. They are FORGIVEN! FORGOTTEN! GONE!

## **2. THE CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN YOUR LIFE**

When a person becomes a Christian things change. Sometimes you don't even realise the changes that take place until you really think about it.

In (NT) 2 Corinthians 5:17 we are told, 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come'.

Look at the list below and see if any of these changes have already taken place in your life since you became a Christian.

- An Inner Peace.
- I have stopped swearing.
- A new joy.
- A sense of being forgiven.
- A desire to pray.
- A desire to please/obey God.
- A new love for God.
- A new interest in the Bible.

There may be other positive changes not listed here.

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### 3. THE INNER WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Another evidence of God's acceptance of you is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that you have become God's child. The moment you became a Christian the Holy Spirit came to live within you. His presence in your life is a continual confirmation and reminder that you are forgiven, that God has accepted you and that you are His child.

(NT) Rom 8:15-17 So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba Father'. 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

The word 'Abba' actually means 'Daddy'. The Holy Spirit helps us to see that God is our loving 'Daddy'. Many human fathers leave a lot to be desired, but God is far better than the best human father you could ever imagine.

As you place your trust in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit will plant deep in your heart that assurance, conviction and confidence that YOU are one of God's children - a member of God's family.

#### **Forgiving those who sin against you**

Unforgiveness and bitterness are the source of many of our problems. They produce arguments, hate, violence, wars, family strife, political unrest and breakdown in communication. Sometimes our resentments may seem justified because we have been badly wronged, or we cannot understand the other person's attitude. Jesus taught a new way of approaching these hurts - we are to treat people as God treats us.

(NT) Luke 6:27-31 'But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. 28 Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. 30 Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. 31 Do to others as you would like them to do to you.'

Review your life and consider if there are people whom you find it hard to forgive, whom you resent, or who have wronged you, or you have wronged. They could be:

\* Parents \* Children \* Husband \* Wife \* Friends \* Previous Spouse \* Employer or employee \* Landlord or tenant \* Ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend \* Those who have influenced you in a harmful way \* Those who have abused you.

NOW - Pray for these people and begin to love them knowing that God loves them and cares for them. Extend your forgiveness to them - if you find this difficult, ask God to help you. Your forgiveness needs to be like your Father's....

## Forgiven! Forgotten! Gone!

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# 3: PRAYER - Talking With God

*Ephesians 6:18*

*'Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.'*

One of the essential ways in which the Christian communicates with God is in prayer. But what exactly is prayer? How do we pray? This is the subject that we are going to be looking at in this chapter.

Of course it is impossible for us to look at this subject in great detail (something that would take us hours to do) - so the purpose is to give a broad overview of some of the basic and practical areas involved in prayer?

## So what is prayer and what is involved?

### Prayer is a two-way conversation

Many people have defined prayer as 'talking to God', but that is only half of the answer. A better definition is the one specifically given in the title of this chapter, i.e. 'talking with God'. In other words, prayer is not just you talking to God, it also God talking to you. Prayer is a two-way conversation.

If you want to get to know someone better you need to spend time with them, to talk to them and share your life with them. So it is in prayer. Prayer should spring from a desire to know God better. So prayer doesn't just involve us speaking to God, it also involves us listening to Him. Like the boy Samuel we need to pray,

(OT) 1 Samuel 3:9 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'.

### BUT HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

It is possible, though unlikely, that you might hear an audible voice. Those times are rare and far between, so don't be disappointed if you don't experience that. More commonly, God will speak to you:

- **THROUGH THE BIBLE.** As you read and meditate on the Scriptures you'll find certain verses 'jumping out of the page' and grabbing your attention.
- **THROUGH PREACHING.** Already you may have been in meetings where it seemed as if what the preacher was saying was tailor-made for you.
- **THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT INSIDE YOU.** You may sense Him directing your thoughts and inclinations in a certain direction. Over time you come to a conclusion that a particular course of action is necessary.

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- **THROUGH SPIRITUAL GIFTS.** God may speak to you through a prophecy for example, or maybe the interpretation to a message in tongues.
  - **THROUGH OUR CONSCIENCE.** Our conscience is God given, and as Christians it will help us to become more aware of God's directions by the Holy Spirit in our lives. As time passes you will become more familiar with that inner voice.
  - **THROUGH COUNSEL.** A church leader or a mature experienced Christian whom you consult for advice may become God's channel for God's word to you.

So prayer has two sides to it. As well as you talking to God, you must also listen to Him. As you learn to listen He may show you that something is wrong in your life, He may tell you to do something. If God is speaking to you, you should do what He says. With experience you'll learn to 'tune in' better and be able to distinguish God's voice more clearly.

## Two kinds of prayer

### 1. Any time, any place

A husband and a wife don't need to make an appointment with each other before they can talk. They are friends and live together, so naturally they can chat about anything and everything whenever they want. The Lord is our friend too (See N.T John 15:15) and by His Spirit He is always with us so you can talk to one another at any time and anywhere.

(NT) 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 Never stop praying.

So you can pray and talk with God at any time and about anything. You might be at work, driving the car, doing the shopping or facing a difficult situation. Whatever it is and wherever you are, you'll find Him always available and ready to hear your spontaneous prayers. Nehemiah once prayed like this when he found himself in a challenging situation. (OT) Nehemiah 2:1-6.

### 2. A focused time

Although a husband and wife can talk to one another at any time, because of the busy nature of modern life, sometimes, they might need to unplug the telephone, or go for a walk, or wait for the children to go to bed so that they can have undisturbed quality time together. Although you can talk to God at any time and anywhere, it is important that you have a regular, focused time, set aside for prayer every day.

(NT) Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Be practical, and build into your personal schedule a regular time when you can give God your undivided attention in prayer. Jesus did this. In (NT) Mark 1:35 we are told that, 'And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed'. In (NT) Luke 5:16 we read that Jesus, 'would withdraw to desolate (lonely, quiet) places and pray.'



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## **Getting Started - A simple prayer plan**

One man called J. Oswald Sanders said, 'There is no way to learn to pray - except by praying.' To learn about prayer is one thing, to pray is another. So where should you start? How do you go about doing it? Although not exhaustive, here is a simple prayer plan to get you started.

### **Always start with Praise**

Praising God puts everything into its proper perspective. First of all, He deserves it, second of all it reminds you that He is God, you are not. He is great and powerful; He can supply all because of who He is. Always start with praising Him.

We praise God in many different ways. In (OT) Psalm 149 & 150 we see some of those ways

### **You need to CONFESS**

If you want to communicate effectively with God in prayer, there must be no blockage between you and Him.

(OT) Psalm 32:1 Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

In (NT) 1 John 1:9 we are told that. 'if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'

So what must you do?

If there are things in the way between you and God, tell Him about them, say you are sorry, ask for forgiveness and claim His strength for the future.

### **You need to give THANKS**

Thanksgiving is always a good thing to do in your planned prayer time. After you have confessed, you then need to thank God

(OT) Psalm 106:1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

In (NT) Ephesians 5:20 we are told 'always give thanks to God the Father for everything'.

We can thank God for Food, Clothes, Home, Health, Pleasures, Family and Friends, Answered Prayer, Our Salvation and many other reasons

### **VARIETY**

You can praise God or thank him with your mouth, by dancing, by clapping or raising your hands or by playing a musical instrument. Something that might help you to thank and praise God in your planned prayer time, is to play and listen to a Christian Worship CD and sing along with it.

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## **You need to ASK**

After you have confessed and thanked God in praise, you can then go on to bring your requests to the Lord.

(NT) Matthew 7:7 'Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.'

God will always answer your prayers. Sometimes His answer will be :-

**= NO**

**= WAIT**

**= GO**

We can ask God about anything. He is interested in every aspect of our life. No matter what it is He is only a prayer away. No matter what His answer is He knows best, you can be sure that He only wants the best for us.

## **We can ask Him about our worries**

Are you worried? Are you anxious? In (NT) Philippians 4:6 we are told, 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

## **We can ask Him when we are unsure what to do**

One of the things we need when we are unsure what to do is wisdom so that we can make the right decision. (NT) James 1:5-6 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

## **We can ask Him when we don't know what or how to pray**

Obviously we need to pray for the things that God wants. A lot of the things that God wants are found in the Bible, so it is important that we read the Bible. By reading the Bible we will discover some of the things God wants us to pray about. When we pray about these things we know that we are praying in the will of God and we can therefore pray with confidence. (N.T) 1 John 5:14. The marvelous truth is that we can bring all our needs to God - money worries, relationships, studies, job, family, health. God also wants us to pray about the needs of others - friends, people who aren't Christians, church leaders, missionaries, politicians, etc.

Sometimes however, the issues are not clear. Sometimes, when you are in difficulties, you will find that you don't really know how or what to pray. The good news is that God understands, and has provided a wonderful prayer-helper: The Holy Spirit Himself! (NT) Romans 8:26-27 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. 27 And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.

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The Holy Spirit will help you pray according to God's will. He may do this by directing your thoughts along certain lines, or He may prompt you to pray in tongues. In this case, your mind won't know what you are praying but in both cases you'll have a real deep conviction in your spirit that you are praying in line with God's will.

## **Focused Prayer – Let's be Practical**

Praying at any time and any place will most likely not be a problem to you, it has probably already become as natural as breathing to you. But getting into the habit of focused prayer, where you spend specific and deliberate time alone with God, may take a bit more effort, time, and some self discipline. There are however some very practical things we can do that will help us to do this.

### **You need to find a suitable PLACE and TIME to pray.**

You need to settle on a suitable place and time to pray so that disturbances can be minimised.

The Place you decide to use for your focused times of prayer needs to be somewhere which you are comfortable in and will enable you to concentrate and not be distracted. It doesn't have to be at home, it can be anywhere as long as it is a place where you are comfortable. You might want to pray in your car or while walking in the local park, etc. One place I would discourage you to pray in, is in bed. Praying in bed is more likely to improve your sleeping more than your praying.

Many years ago a famous preacher's wife who had many children couldn't find a place of quiet to pray so she put her apron over her head and her children all knew when this happened she must not be disturbed.

The Time you decide on for your focused time of prayer needs to be one that suits you. Many find early morning is a good time, when it's quiet and they are less likely to be disturbed. Others spend time in prayer during their lunch breaks. Young mums often find mid-morning is best for them. Find a time that suits you.

King David used to pray, (OT) Psalm 5:3 'In the morning.'

Think about when would be a good time for you.

## **Some other practical considerations**

Here are some other practical considerations that will help you to develop your focused time of prayer.

**Start small** with a few minutes of prayer every day. As your friendship with the Lord develops you will find that you will want to spend more time in prayer.

**Always read your Bible** during your time of focused prayer. Ask God to speak to you and show you something as you read the Bible. This is one way in which you can go into 'listening mode' and not just talk to the Lord but talk with the Lord.

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**Make sure you are comfortable** when you pray. There isn't any one particular posture that you should adopt in prayer. You can sit, kneel, stand or walk around, or use all or some of these during your prayer times. The important thing is to make sure you are comfortable when you are praying.

**Put together a prayer list** of the things and people you are to pray about. When someone asks you to pray for them, or someone asks you to pray about a particularly situation write it down on your prayer list. By writing it down you will not forget it. A good idea is to plan to pray for certain things on certain days. It's easy to become self-centered, so always pray for other people and situations as well as for yourself and your own needs. And remember: God isn't a slot-machine guaranteed to produce the answer you want, when you want, just to please you. He's a person and He's your Father and He wants you to develop your relationship with Him.

**Have a notebook** for jotting down anything you feel significant. If you sense God has shown you something while you have been praying or reading your Bible jot down what you believe He is saying to you. Ask God to bring to mind the names of people or the things He wants you to pray for, and to show you any needs they have. Jot them down, then pray for each one.

**REMEMBER!**  
**THE CHRISTIAN WHO IS TOO BUSY TO PRAY,**  
**IS TOO BUSY!**

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# 4: THE BIBLE - A Wonderful Book

*2 Timothy 3:16-17*

*'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'*

No one in their right mind would doubt that the Bible is a remarkable book. It has long been the number one best seller. Abraham Lincoln said of it, 'I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man.' Charles Dickens described the New Testament as, 'the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.' The Bible really is the most amazing book. These 66 books were written by some 40 authors over a period of about 1600 years. It covers events from creation to the late first century. The authors include kings, priests, prophets, fishermen, a tax collector, a tent maker and a doctor. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek.

The Christian faith is not based on human ideas or natural wisdom but on God's revelation to mankind. What this means is that we cannot make up what we believe - we must listen and obey what God says. The Bible is a record of what God has said and done and is our direction for life - it is our final authority in matters of faith. It is in the Bible that we get a clear understanding of right and wrong. It is the Bible that we can turn to for guidance when we encounter difficult questions or when we are facing personal crisis. It is in the Bible where we find the truth about who God is, who we are and how He has bridged the gulf that is between us. It is our sure foundation.

Yet to many, even some Christians, the Bible remains a mental maze, a complex puzzle that defies understanding. So what is it? Where did it come from, and how did we get it?

## **The Bible is a God-breathed book**

(NT) 2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

What this means is that the Bible has its origin in God. The striking unity of the Bible also confirms that God Himself is its ultimate authority. We need to understand however what this does not mean.

### **THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE HEADINGS OR CHAPTER DIVISIONS ARE GOD-BREATHED.**

These have been added and arranged to help us make our reading of the Bible a little bit easier.

### **THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT EVERY PART OF SCRIPTURE WILL HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON US.**

While all Scripture is God-breathed different parts of the Bible will have different effects on us. For example, (NT) Romans 8 is more helpful and valuable to us than (OT) Numbers chapters 1&2. Both are God-breathed and equally reliable, but they were given for different purposes.

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## **THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE WRITERS WERE TAKEN OVER AND MADE TO WRITE DESPITE OF THEMSELVES.**

The writers of Scripture did not go into some kind of trance when they wrote. They were not like robots and they didn't find that their pens developed minds of their own.

(NT) 2 Peter 1:21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

God the Holy Spirit was the source of the Bible and human writers were the agents. God moved through them and they recorded His truth completely free of error.

The Bible then is God's Word to us. God inspired human writers to communicate God's plans and purpose for us. This is what the [phrase 'God-breathed' means. It's His Word.

### **The Bible is a two-part book**

The Bible is like a library of 66 books divided into 2 main groups: The Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books).

To help us find our way around them, each book is divided into chapters and verses.

### **The Old Testament**

The Old Testament begins with Genesis and ends with Malachi. Starting with creation, the Old Testament tells how God introduced Himself to great individuals like Enoch, Noah and Abraham. Then He showed more of Himself to Abraham's growing family. Finally, He took the descendants, the nation of Israel and made them His special people. To them He gave the Ten Commandments and other laws, and to them He promised the Messiah. This became the way by which God would eventually reach all humanity.

- **Law** - Genesis to Deuteronomy - 5 Books
- **History** - Joshua to Esther -12 Books
- **Poetry** - Job to Song of Solomon - 5 Books
- **Prophecy** - Isaiah to Malachi -17 Books

### **The New Testament**

The promised Messiah was Jesus. The New Testament records His life, death, resurrection and ascension, and the start of the church. The books of Acts and the Letters (or Epistles) show how the church grew rapidly and how it coped with some of its early problems. The last book - Revelation gives a glimpse into the future events yet to come especially the return of Jesus Christ to earth and His final victory over sin and Satan.

- **Biography** - Matthew to John - 4 Books
- **History** - Acts -1 Book
- **Doctrinal** - Romans to Jude - 21 Books
- **Prophecy** - Revelation -1 Book

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## **The Bible is a reliable book**

The Bible is a book to be trusted. We can trust it and know for certainty that what it says is significant and necessary. It has physical, spiritual and eternal benefits.

(NT) 1 Peter 1:25 ...But the word of the Lord remains forever.

(NT) John 17:17, Jesus says to His Father. 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.'

## **The Bible tells us how to be saved**

(NT) John 5:39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me (Jesus)

In (NT) 1 John 5:13, we are told why 1 John was written? This is what it says. 'I write these things to you who believe in name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.'

(NT) Acts 17:11-12 And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

## **The Bible tells us how to live**

The Bible also speaks to us about all kinds of earthly and practical issues. For example, it gives instruction on things like marriage, employment, children, youth, adults, the elderly, widows and orphans, government, how we are to relate to people and how we should treat one another, social issues, the poor, wealth and riches and many other practical topics.

(NT) 2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

As you read the Scriptures you will find answers and direction for the problems that confuse you.

(NT) James 1:22-25 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

Like a true mirror, the Bible gives us a clear picture of what we are like. It shows us where we need to change and what we should do.

The Bible is a book that deals with real issues, it teaches us how we ought to live in this world. It is a book that if heeded will reap benefits in your life. It holds rewards for its readers.

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## **The Bible is a readable book**

The Bible is a book that must be read. For all the reasons given already, there is only one way the Bible can benefit you and that is by reading it. It is the most fundamental way that God will speak to you. It is the Christian's spiritual food and guiding light.

## **Getting the most from your Bible**

In order for you to get the most from your Bible here is some advice that will help you.

### **Some Spiritual Advice**

#### **1. Pray First**

The Bible is God's book and we need His help to understand it.

#### **2. Get rid of wrong attitudes**

(NT) 1 Peter 1:23-2:3 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. 24 As the Scriptures say, 'People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. 25 But the word of the Lord remains forever.' And that word is the Good News that was preached to you. 2:1 So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. 2 Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, 3 now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

You won't get much from reading your Bible if your relationship with God or other people is not right. If there are matters that need putting right, do it without delay. Then you'll find the Scriptures coming alive to you as you read.

#### **3. Come with a desire**

(NT) 1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation.

You've got to come with a hunger to the Bible, with a thirst and a desire for it, like that of 'newborn babies'. This is normal. If you have no appetite at all, something's wrong.

#### **4. Come with expectancy**

Part of your hunger will be an expectant attitude. Expect the Lord to speak to you from His Word. Come to it with a willingness to be obedient to whatever He might say to you.

### **Some Practical Advice**

#### **1. Set aside a regular time to read the Bible**

Just as we need regular meals to remain physically healthy, we also need to feed regularly on God's Word to remain spiritually healthy. It is important therefore that you set aside regular time when you can read and meditate on Scripture. One of the best times to do this is during your prayer times that we looked at in our last lesson. Start by setting aside 15 minutes each day when you can find a quiet place to read the Bible and pray. Find a time that is best for you.



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## **2. Don't Rush - Read carefully**

Parents often tell their hungry children to chew their food properly before swallowing it. It's the same with God's Word. Take time to chew over a sentence or a verse rather than rushing on to finish a section or chapter. Read a section several times to make sure you really understand it. Aim to get all the goodness out of every bite.

## **3. Follow a plan**

It is good to have some kind of plan when reading the Bible. But don't start with Leviticus or Ezekiel. A better idea would be to start by reading the Gospels, the books that record the life of Jesus. Then you could try a few Psalms, which are songs of praise and prayer addressed to God. One of the New Testament letters would give you a different flavour, after which you could try some of the tasty morsels of wisdom from the book of Proverbs. You will possibly find yourself spending more time in the New Testament than the Old because, as a Christian, you are a New Testament person - a friend of Jesus whom the New Testament introduces. If you want to be more systematic you can get a One-Year Bible, which has the text of Scripture divided into 365 daily sections so that you can read the whole Bible in a year. Whatever method you adopt have a notebook handy so you can jot down the thoughts the Holy Spirit gives you as you read.

## **4. Read a Bible translation you are comfortable with**

There are lots of different Bible translations around today, so choose one you are comfortable with. Some of the most common ones are, The New International Version, The Good News Version, The Living Bible, English Standard Version and the Message Bible.

## **5. If you don't understand - Ask**

If there are things you don't understand then ask. A Christian friend or a church minister should be able to help. Something else that will help you to learn and understand the message of the Bible is to make sure you attend regularly church services where you will hear the Bible being explained and expounded as it is preached. There are also various Bible reading booklets available that you can use when you read your Bible. The most popular are, 'Scripture Union Bible Notes', 'Every Day with Jesus' and 'Word for Today'. These booklets will give you a few Bible verses to read with some short notes to help you understand the passage. 'Youversion' is one app for your phone that gives you the bible reading and notes to go with it.

## **6. Try to apply what you read to your every day life**

The truth is that you must apply the Bible and put it into practice otherwise it will not benefit you at all. We can read it and even believe it, but unless we practice it, it will not help us. God has revealed Himself to us, He has recorded His truth and preserved it through the centuries. If you ask, God will help you understand it. And if you put it into practice, it will change your life.

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# 5: WATER BAPTISM

*Matthew 28:19-20*

*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations,  
baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'*

Once a person becomes a Christian, the next step that needs to be taken on the Christian pathway is for that person to be baptised. This is such an integral part of the Christian initiation that the New Testament takes it for granted that a profession of faith in Christ will be followed more or less immediately by water baptism. Consider the following verses – (NT) Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 & 41, 18:8, 22:16.

Every believer needs to be baptised. Have you been baptised? If you haven't you need to as soon as possible.

## **What is Baptism?**

We will begin by looking at what baptism is not.

### **What it is not.**

The first thing you need to understand is that:

### **IT IS NOT CHRISTENING - THE SPRINKLING OF BABIES**

Baptism isn't for babies. Not once does the New Testament refer to such a practice. Instead, it shows baptism to be for believers only, which implies a certain level of mental understanding. In addition to the Bible not teaching this, it is also logical and sensible to reject this practice. For example:

- An Infant cannot receive the Word of God as we are required to - (NT) Acts 2:41.
- An Infant cannot believe as we are called to - (NT) Romans 10:9.
- An Infant cannot repent as we are commanded to - (NT) Acts 2:38

Nowhere in the New Testament is it suggested that a few drops of water are used in baptism. All the evidence is that there needed to be a large and plentiful supply of water, enough in fact to cover the person being baptised. If the Bible is our source of authority and rule, then we must reject christening as a substitute for what the Bible teaches on this subject.

We see in (NT) John 3:23-24 that there was 'plenty of water' - At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism.

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## **IT IS NOT ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION**

Although baptism is very important and needs to be obeyed, it is not essential for salvation. It doesn't matter what form of outward ceremony or sacrament you partake in, none of them can save a person - Jesus Christ is the only person who can forgive a person and make you right with God.

BUT - That does not mean it's optional. It was a command of Jesus that we do it.

### **What it is.**

The best way of answering this question is to say that:

## **IT IS A PUBLIC SYMBOLIC ACT OF FAITH**

Water baptism is a symbolic demonstration to what has already taken place since you became a Christian. It is an external symbolic declaration of the internal experience of salvation.

It is a declaration by a person - saying 'I follow Jesus.'

## **There are at least two things that water baptism symbolises:**

### **1: It symbolises THE WASHING AWAY OF YOUR SINS**

(NT) Acts 2:38 Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Water baptism symbolises that we have been washed, that our sins have been washed away, that we have had a spiritual bath and have been made clean.

(NT) Acts 22:16 'What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptised. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.'

Just as a bath cleans the dirt from our bodies, so baptism shows that as Christians we have been 'washed clean' from the effects of sin. Now, do not misunderstand - Baptism does not wash your sins away. Jesus does that when we are saved. It's a symbolic way of showing that your sins *have been* washed away.

### **2: It symbolises THE DEATH OF YOUR OLD LIFE & THE BEGINNING OF YOUR NEW LIFE**

Baptism is an outward act declaring that you have become a Christian.

(NT) 2 Corinthians 5:17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

When you are baptised you are declaring that what happened to Jesus physically has happened to you spiritually - you have become a new person and have a new life. (NT) Romans 6:4.

So baptism is a symbol the old life you used to live before you became a Christian has gone, it is finished and is dead and that you are now living a brand new life.

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As you go down into the water this symbolises the end of your old life, that your old life has gone (buried), and as you come up out of the water this symbolises that your new life has come, a life of victory.

### **It is an act of obedience**

We will get to this in a moment - but the main reason to be baptised is because Jesus commanded it. For many it is the first test of obedience. To be a Christian is to live like Jesus told us and this act is a step in that journey of obedience.

### **Why should a person be baptised?**

You should be baptised for the following reasons:

#### **Because Jesus commanded it.**

Being baptised is an act of obedience to Christ and a clear-cut demonstration that you now take orders from your new boss Jesus Christ! (NT) John 14:15

From the Bible verse quoted at the beginning of this chapter (NT) Matthew 28:19-20. there are three things Jesus instructed His followers to do:

1. Go
2. Make disciples of all nations
3. Baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Baptism is an act of Christian obedience; it is a command to be obeyed. So by being baptised you obey Jesus' command.

In (NT) John 15:14 says 'You are my friends if you do what I command.'

Therefore, not getting baptised is an act of disobedience.

### **To show your faith in Jesus**

By being baptised you are telling other people present that you're serious about being a Christian. By being publicly baptised you are declaring, 'From now on, Jesus is my Lord and He's the one who will direct my life'. This is why those being baptised are asked to make a verbal declaration of their recognition of Jesus as Lord of their lives.

In (NT) Romans 10:9 we are told, 'That if you confess with your mouth that "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

By being baptised, you demonstrate publicly that you love Jesus and want to live for Him. When your family and friends see you submit to baptism they know you are serious about following Jesus.

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## Who should be baptised?

Baptism as the Bible presents it cannot be entered into by just anyone. So who can and who should get baptised?

### Those who have accepted and believed the message of salvation.

The only person who can be baptised according to God's Word is those who have repented and believed. Anyone who loves Jesus and knows Him as Saviour and Lord is a candidate for baptism.

Baptism is always linked to faith. In the New Testament we see many people getting baptised (Acts 2:37-41), the individual getting baptized (Acts 8:26-40), and even a family baptism (Acts 16:29-34). In every case where baptism is mentioned and seen without exception, we see that it is carried out upon the grounds of faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:41, 8:12-13, 35-37, 9:17-18, 10:47-48, 16:13-15, 25-34, 18:8, 19:1-7)

In (NT) Acts 2:41 we have an example of many people being baptised. All of them had accepted the message (Become a follower of Jesus)

(NT) Acts 18:8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised.

A question that is often asked by some is, 'What if a person was baptised or christened as a baby, should they be baptised now that they are believers?' The answer is YES! Christening or infant baptism is not taught in the Bible. Baptism is for believers only, for those who have personally and individually put their faith in Jesus Christ.

If you have been baptised as an infant, you still need to be baptised as a believer. Believers baptism is something you choose to do because you want to please and obey the Lord. It is a personal expression of your faith in Christ.

In all the incidents we have looked at, baptism occurred after an acceptance and belief in the message of salvation. Baptism is linked so closely to believing in Jesus that many Scriptures place them side by side as part of becoming a Christian.

*Mark 16:16*

*'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'*

*Acts 2:38*

*'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.'*

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## **Those who understand the implications.**

The Scriptures demand faith and repentance before baptism is administered, i.e. - a personal experience of salvation. It is therefore imperative that a person understands what they are doing and what baptism means. Every baptismal candidate should be counselled and taught this subject, so as to ensure they clearly understand and appreciate it.

In this church we make it our aim to discuss with and instruct all those candidates preparing for baptism, so that this step of obedience is fully appreciated and enjoyed.

## **How should a person be baptised?**

The Bible teaches that there is a particular way that believers should be baptised. First of all a believer should be baptised:

### **By full immersion**

The word 'baptise, baptism' in the original Greek language means, 'to dip, immerse, submerge, plunge, drench, soak.' The word was used of ships that sank, and of dyeing cloth, the dipping of material into dye. This is confirmed in all the examples in Scripture. When believers were baptised they were totally immersed, they were dipped under the water. As Bible believing Christians this is the way we should also conduct baptism. (NT) Mark 1:10, John 3:23, Acts 8:38-39.

Today Bible believing churches baptise people by full immersion. This might take place in the sea or a river, or in a swimming pool - anywhere where there is plenty of water. Some churches have their own pool in the church building for conducting baptisms.

### **With the Scriptural formula**

When Jesus commanded the disciples to baptise those who believe, He gave them a formula to use, a form of words to adopt during baptism.

(NT) Matthew 28:19 .....baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus authorises us to recognise all three persons of the Godhead when baptising believers, signifying that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all involved in the salvation of an individual and that all three are equally divine.

## **What does baptism do for the believer?**

There are at least six things baptism does for the believer.

### **1: It identifies you with Christ**

This is just another official way of publicly saying, 'I love Jesus, I belong to Jesus, I am not ashamed of Jesus.' By being baptised, you publicly demonstrate that you love Jesus and you want to live for Him.

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## **2: It sets a pattern of obedience to Christ's Lordship**

Baptism is an act of obedience to Christ. Your baptism will set a pattern of obedience to His Lordship in your life for the future. In baptism you are saying that Jesus is not only your Saviour, He's also your Lord - He's in control. If Jesus really is your Lord, you will get baptised!

## **3: It will develop your spiritual life**

There is great blessing and satisfaction in obeying the Lord. God is pleased when a person is baptised, when a person obeys His commands. Your baptism can only result in the blessing and development of your spiritual relationship with Christ.

## **4: It ratifies your profession of faith in Jesus Christ**

We are not baptised into 'a denomination' or 'organisation' but 'into Christ'. Baptism is a ceremony of initiation that you will never forget. There will be no forgetting the moment you were baptised, when you were dipped under the water. This is a spiritual milestone which you can later look back on with assurance.

## **5: It prepares you for further service**

It was after Jesus was baptised in water that He was filled with the Holy Spirit and went out into service. It was the same with Saul. This is a good biblical pattern for all believers to follow. In baptism you are publicly saying, 'I am going to serve you in whatever way I can. Use me Lord, I am available.'

## **6: It gives you a sense of assurance**

Baptism will give you that pledge of assurance in your conscience about your past. It helps you to realise that your past sins are forgiven, that the guilt has gone and that God has accepted you and established you in His righteousness. Through baptism you will receive a sense of peace, assurance and confidence. (NT) 1 Peter 3:21.

## **Have you been baptised?**

If you haven't been baptised you need to get baptised ***AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!***

Don't delay, talk to your minister today!

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# 6:COMMUNION-A Covenant Meal

## *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

One institution that the Christian and the Christian Church practices all over the world is 'the communion'. Other names given for this are, 'the Eucharist, the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper'. It is an event where in obedience to the command of Jesus, Christians regularly meet together to take bread and wine. It is a time when Christians remember the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In this course we are going to look at this simple ceremony, given by Jesus and practiced by every Christian Church.

### **Origins - Where did it come from?**

Its origin is in the Jewish Passover meal. Jewish families did this once a year in remembrance of one of the greatest moments in their history: their ancestors' great deliverance from slavery in Egypt during the time of Moses. You can read the account in (OT) Exodus 11-12.

You may remember the story. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt and Pharaoh was unwilling for them to leave. God had sent a number of plagues on the Egyptians and the final one was the death of the first-born.

In (OT) Exodus 12:21-28 God told the Israelites that He was going to punish the Egyptians for their unwillingness to let God's people go free. To ensure that the Israelites were not included in this they were commanded to sacrifice a lamb and place some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the door frames of their homes. They were informed that when the Lord saw the blood He would 'pass over' their homes. The Lord went on to command them to make this a yearly ceremony to commemorate and help them remember and teach their children how God delivered them from Egypt. It was to be called, 'The Passover'. (v26-27)

In (NT) Luke 22:14-20 we have the account of Jesus eating His last meal with the disciples before He died. Later that evening He would be arrested and tried before being crucified on the following day. But this was not any ordinary meal, this meal was the Passover meal. This is why sometimes 'the communion' is sometimes called, 'The Last Supper'. To the astonishment of the disciples, Jesus turned this meal into a remembrance of Himself. He used bread and wine to explain that He was going to bring a far greater deliverance than that of Israel from Egypt - He was going to deliver His people from slavery to sin and Satan. Jesus was actually declaring that He was the fulfilment of the Passover.



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(NT) Luke 22:19-20 He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.' 20 After supper he took another cup of wine and said, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.'

In (NT) 1 Corinthians 5:7 we are clearly told that Christ is our Passover Lamb.

John the Baptist said of Jesus in (NT) John 1:29, 'Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' Because Jesus has died, God will pass over our sins and we can escape and be delivered from God's judgement.

### **What does it mean?....What's the point of it?**

Physical acts can convey spiritual truths. That's what a sacrament is. We saw in our last chapter for instance, that water baptism is a reminder that our old life is dead (buried) and that we are now living a new life. So what's the truth conveyed in the communion? We'll answer this question by looking at the main Bible passage that deals specifically with this and highlight some aspects of it.

### **Looking Back - Remembering**

(NT) 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

When you take the bread, you remember the suffering of Jesus. His body was abused, spat upon, whipped. He was dressed in a purple robe, crowned with thorns, deserted by those who followed Him and made to struggle as He carried the weight of the cross, and then He was crucified.

(NT) 1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

In this verse Paul says that by shedding His blood Jesus has initiated a new covenant. A covenant was a binding agreement, a contract or promise made between people. In ancient times it was often sealed by shedding the blood of an animal and eating a meal together. Jesus was saying that because He was going to die for the sins of mankind, He was making a new covenant between God and man. As a Christian you are a beneficiary of the new covenant, and the meal that celebrates it is 'the communion'. It's a meal we enjoy regularly.

The 'communion' directs your thoughts back in history to the cross, which is the source of all the blessings we enjoy here and now. It reminds you of the awful cost of your salvation, paid willingly by Jesus out of love for you. God never intended 'the communion' to be a mournful occasion. While Christ's suffering on the cross was appalling, you must never forget that Calvary was followed by an empty tomb. Hard on the heels of death came resurrection! So 'the communion' service should be a joyful occasion as we realise He is alive!

The communion is a reminder of Christ's death at Calvary. The bread that we break reminds us of His body, broken in crucifixion for us, and the wine is a picture of His blood shed for our salvation. Whenever you partake in 'the communion' you remember and proclaim Christ's death (v26)

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## Looking Around and Within

One of the reasons why we use the word 'communion' to refer to this event, is because we take it in the company of other Christians. In v 27-32 Paul talks about the importance of making sure that our relationship with one another is in good standing.

(NT) 1 Corinthians 11:27-30. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

The 'body' Paul refers to here is not the physical body of Jesus but the group of Christians in the local church with whom we take the bread and wine.

In (NT) 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 Paul talks about this concept. The church is often called the body of Christ. It is through this body that He operates here on earth. As a Christian, you are part of the body of Christ. Notice what Paul says in (NT) 1 Corinthians 12:27. As you eat and drink with your spiritual brothers and sisters you need to thank the Lord for joining you to them and you need to make sure you are in fellowship with them.

This is where we need to look within and be careful that our attitude to our brothers and sisters is right. Why? Because it's dangerous to share 'the communion', which declares to them, 'I'm with you and for you' if in our hearts, we are saying, 'I'm against you'. We also need to make sure that if we are doing anything we know to be wrong that we confess it and ask God's forgiveness. To continue taking the communion when you are not right with your brother or sister or to continue doing that which is wrong without being willing to turn from it will invite God's judgement, and in some cases this can be very severe. It is essential that we make sure our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters is good. If we need to repent and forgive we must do so.

A good prayer to pray before we take part in communion is found in (OT) Psalm 139:23-24. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

## Looking Forward

(NT) 1 Corinthians 11:26. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

This reminds us that the present state of affairs won't continue for ever. Each time we partake in the communion it is both one time more and one time less - because Jesus is coming back.

(NT) Matthew 26:29. 'I (Jesus) tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.'

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When we take the communion we are looking forward to Christ's return in glory. We won't always look back to the cross and remember Him with bread and wine. One day we shall see Him face to face and be with Him for ever.

The love and fellowship you enjoy here and now is just a foretaste of the unspeakably wonderful love and fellowship that awaits you when Christ returns. The Bible describes this in terms of a marriage. Christ, the bridegroom, will be at last united with the church, His bride. And that's us! The wedding supper of the Lamb.

(NT) Revelation 19:6-9. ...will be the meal to end all meals, a great heavenly banquet that will last for ever.

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## 7: THE CHURCH

*Hebrews 10:25*

*'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching'.*

People go to church for all kinds of reasons. Some might go because they like the singing or because they are lonely and they enjoy being with other people. Others might go to church because their parents or their friends do, or others because they are thinking of getting married. Some go to church regularly, others spasmodically and others only when they have to, like when they attend a wedding. What about you, why do you go to church and how regularly do you attend?

Some think church is not an important part of a Christian life and that as long as they pray and read the Bible all will be just fine. Is that the case?

In this section we are going to look at the role the church plays in the life of the Christian. Just how important is it and what's it all about? We will begin by looking at the question, what is it?

### **Understanding the church - What is it?**

In the Bible and particularly the New Testament the word 'church' is used in various ways to help us get a better understanding of what exactly it is? We will begin by noticing that:

#### **It is Universal**

The universal church includes every one throughout the whole world who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour. It includes all those who are alive now, all those who are yet to become Christians and all those who have died and are in God's presence right now. It is not yet complete and the first meeting is yet to take place because Jesus hasn't returned yet.

The true church is made up of all those people on earth and in heaven who have repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ - if you have done this you belong to it too. How large it is we do not know, but it is massive and will include millions of people from all ages, backgrounds, cultures and nationalities. (NT) Revelation 5:9-10.

One example of where Jesus used the word 'church' in the universal sense is found in (NT) Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

#### **It is Local**

The word 'church' is also used in the New Testament to refer to the local church. The local church is a group of Christians united in certain beliefs, aims and purpose, working together for God in a local area. The local church is an expression of the universal church in a particular place. As we will see in this chapter it is important that every Christian belongs to a local church. The church either means, 'the local gathering of God's people in a particular place' or, 'every person in heaven and on earth in different places who know Jesus Christ.'

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Look at the following verses from the New Testament and see if you can identify which is being referred to. See if you can decide which is UNIVERSAL and which is LOCAL.

- (NT) Romans 16:3-5 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.
- (NT) Revelation 2:18 To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.
- (NT) Colossians 4:16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.
- (NT) Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

The church then is both universal and local. It is mainly through the local church that God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world. Every Christian needs to be involved in a local church. Every Christian needs a spiritual home as well as a physical home and the local church is where you will find it. If you haven't discovered a local church yet, you need to do so as soon as possible.

### **It is People**

The 'church' as described in the New Testament is not a building, it is people. As a Christian, you along with the other Christians you relate to are the church. A local church is made up of believers who meet together in a local area to worship God together. The church is built on relationships between God and man and between people. These relationships are only meaningful with the love, trust and commitment, which Jesus talked about.

In (NT) John 13:34-35 Jesus says: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

### **You need to be committed to a local church**

The only way you can really benefit from church and the church can benefit from you, is to be committed to it. Where we meet is not important, the important thing is to find a local church where the people truly love and honour the Lord Jesus Christ and stick with them. But don't expect to find a perfect church because there isn't one. The church is made up of people and just as there is no perfect people, so there is no perfect church. We all have our weaknesses and we can all find faults if we want to. But this is no reason for not being committed.

There are basically two main ways in which you can show your commitment to a local church.

### **1: BY ATTENDING REGULARLY**

Both Scripture and experience confirms that any person who claims to be a follower of Jesus but neglects the regular consistent gathering together of God's people will not grow in their relationship with Jesus. How many times have you heard it said, 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian?' The answer to that is, 'if you are a Christian you WILL go to church.'

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(NT) Hebrews 10:25 says, 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as we see the Day approaching.'

The Bible commands us to regularly meet together for fellowship and encouragement. This is something the New Testament Christians did - they regularly and continually met together as church.

(NT) Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

In (NT) John 20:19-25. We read that Thomas missed out on one of the appearances of Jesus after he was resurrected because he wasn't there.

It is very important that you regularly attend church gatherings, in fact, this should be your desire. Sunday is obviously an important time when the church meets together and if you are really committed to the church you will ensure that you regularly and consistently attend the Sunday services. Of course, this means much more than an hour or two on a Sunday - it means we will regularly attend other meetings too, some of which will be during the week and not just on Sunday. This might involve large meetings, small meetings, formal and informal times. But it means being together as much as we can.

## **2: BY GETTING INVOLVED**

If you are really committed to the local church you will not only regularly and consistently meet together with your brothers and sisters, but you will also get involved in the life of the church. Make yourself available to serve in whatever way you can. Become a contributor and a participator, not a spectator. Being committed involves service. Every one of us have a part to play in church life. As we have already noted, we need to find the things that God wants us to do and then use these abilities for the benefit of your fellow Christians.

At first this might involve doing small things, but as you grow and as the church leadership see that you can be trusted in the small things other opportunities will be given you to serve in other areas. One thing you can do immediately is to ask if there is anything you can do now, any way you can serve and get involved, however small it may be. This thought will be developed upon more in the next point, which is - Why do you need to attend church?

Part of the Christian life involves getting on with other people, especially fellow Christians. Jesus wants the church to be an example of how a group of people with different personalities, backgrounds and cultures can live in harmony with one another. Young and old, black and white, intelligent and not so intelligent, rich and poor, introvert and extrovert, male and female are all equally important to God.

The words 'one another' or 'each other' appear many times in the New Testament. In each case they tell us something about how we should relate to one another. Below you will find some examples of these in the New Testament.

- Romans 14:13
- Romans 15:7
- Galatians 5:13
- Galatians 6:2

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- Ephesians 4:32
  - Colossians 3:9
  - James 5:16

One of the best descriptions given of the church is that of a body - the body of Christ. The main passage where we find this is (NT) 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. From this passage the church is compared to a human body. The members of the church are like the parts of the body. Turn to this passage and notice the following:

- We are all part of the same body (v12)
- We are not the same - we have different gifts and functions (v14-19)
- Variety is a strength (v17)
- We are all needed (v21)
- Every member is important (v22-25)
- We should share in each others sufferings and joys (v26)

This is why it is important to become part of the church so that you can find your gifts and function in the local body of Christ. You need your brothers and sisters and they need you. We are all different but this can be a strength as you pull together and grow in your knowledge of Jesus Christ.

### **Why do you need to attend church?**

There are many good reasons why we need to regularly go to church. In addition to the fact that we are commanded to do this, what other reasons are there? Below is a list of Bible verses and a list of statements that give us some reasons for why we must meet together as Christians.

- (OT) Psalm 100:4-5
- (NT) 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- (NT) Matthew 18:20
- (NT) Hebrews 10:25

What these verses and many others teach us is that we need to come together to GIVE AND RECEIVE.

In (NT) Acts 2:42 we see 4 reasons we should meet together regularly: They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

One of the ways we receive is as we listen to experienced Christians explain to us what the Bible teaches through preaching. This is a very important part of church life and it is one of the main ways we learn about how God wants us to live. This was one of the reasons why the New Testament Christians came together as mentioned in (NT) Acts 2:42 given above.

Another way we receive is as we listen to and take advice from the church leaders. In the New Testament time, the local church was led by elders or overseers. (You will find some information about this in (NT) 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, Hebrews 13:7&17, 1Peter 5:1-3). This is another major way in which God speaks to us. Through these ministries you can be helped, directed, prepared, taught and disciplined. As a Christian you need to know that your spiritual leaders are available to help you and advise you.

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In (NT) 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 we are commanded to 'respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.'

Sometimes these leaders are given other names. (NT) Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.

What v12-16 shows us is that members of God's family (the church) develop through good leadership guiding and equipping them.

One of the reasons we are to meet together with our brothers and sisters is so that we can receive. But by far the main reason is to give. The New Testament makes it very clear that we are part of the church for the purpose of giving. This is how we get involved - we get involved by giving, by serving. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that if we are to receive we must give.

In (NT) Luke 6:38 Jesus says: 'Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.'

This principle is a vital spiritual law. We receive in proportion to what we give - give and you will receive. So if you want to receive, and be blessed, if want to benefit from when you meet together with other Christians, you need to get involved - you need to give - you need to serve.

In (NT) Acts 20:35 We are told that Jesus said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'

## **HERE ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN GIVE - WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN SERVE THE BODY.**

### **USE YOUR GIFTS**

The church can continue the work of Jesus here on earth as you participate with the gifts God has given you. These gifts are given for the building up of the body of Christ so that it can be effective for God.

In (NT) Romans 12:3-8 we have a list of some different gifts.

### **SERVE THE BODY PRACTICALLY**

As already noted above, you have some ability you can use to 'serve one another in love' - (NT) Galatians 5:13. Here are just a few ideas (there are many more) of how you can serve the body practically: Coffee making/serving, Children and teens, Stewarding, Gardening, Visiting, Catering, Transport, Letter writing, Communion serving, General D.I.Y, etc.

There are of course many more practical areas where you can get involved in serving the body. As you contribute your time, effort and skill, you'll be greatly blessed, as well as being a blessing to others.



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## **SERVE THE BODY SPIRITUALLY**

(NT) 1 Corinthians 14:26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

When we come together for worship, we are to come prepared to participate, to contribute in whatever way we can. This might be a prayer, an expression of thanks, a testimony, a reading, or a spiritual gift, etc. The important thing is to come ready to participate. The Lord doesn't want you sitting back and becoming a spectator. As a new Christian it may take time for you to feel comfortable enough to actually do something publicly, like praying, but you can still be a participator by simply joining in with every one else. If you're the shy, quiet kind, ask the Lord to help you overcome your reticence.

## **GIVE FINANCIALLY**

Serving and giving extends to money. According to the New Testament, money is important to the kingdom of God - though greed is condemned. (NT) 1 Timothy 6:10.

The Bible tells us your giving should be:

In proportion to your means. A bank manager will obviously give more than a student. With cheerfulness. Better not to give at all than to give reluctantly. (NT) 2 Corinthians 9:7 says 'God loves a cheerful giver.'

Our giving should also be Systematic. Aim to plan ahead rather than give haphazardly.

The church, like most others, needs finance for the support of full time ministers in the church, gifts for Christian workers overseas, visiting speakers and helping the needy in church. In addition, we spend money on evangelism, maintenance of church premises, gas and electricity, printing, stationary and postage - and much more. Be a giver – of yourself, your time, your gifts, your skills, your insights and your finance - and experience the blessing of God, who, 'so the loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.' (NT) John 3:16.

## **How should you come to church?**

If you are going to really benefit from those times when we come together then it is essential that we come in a right manner. How you come to church and your attitude in church is vitally important - we need to come to church in the right way in order to know God's blessing upon these times.

The first thing you need to do is to ensure that you are in the best physical, mental and spiritual shape. For this to happen you need to take time to PREPARE BEFORE YOU COME. Preparing beforehand is going to help you come ready and prepared for worship.

## **You need to come prepared physically**

It is important you come to church prepared physically and mentally so that you arrive in a relaxed frame of mind. There is nothing worse than arriving at church late and unsettled because we haven't prepared adequately in the physical and mental realm. Using Sunday as our example, here are some practical suggestions to help you:

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## **1. Get up in plenty of time**

In order to be ready for church get up in plenty of time. (Going to bed earlier than normal the night before will help!). In addition to the obvious washing and dressing, there can be numerous other things that you might need to do - getting up in plenty of time will help you to accomplish these without rushing around in a panic and will ensure that you get to church in plenty of time.

## **2. Do some extra preparation the night before**

Take extra time the night before to get things together and ready for the following day. For example, if the car needs filling up with petrol do it on Saturday, so you won't have to do it on Sunday. Also make sure you have your Bible, notepad and pen ready. I believe this is something you should always come to church with. There are a whole variety of things that could be included here depending on your personal circumstances.

### **You need to come prepared spiritually**

As we have already noted from (NT) 1 Corinthians 14:26 we are to come to church prepared to participate and contribute. This becomes easier and more probable if you have adequately prepared yourself spiritually beforehand. This is another reason for either getting up in time before the meeting, or spending some extra time in preparation the night before. You might want to spend some time praying and reading the Bible. Ask God to soften your heart so that you are ready to hear what God might want to say to you and how God might want to use you. Confess any anger or sin you have towards others so that it doesn't interfere with your time worshipping God at church.

## **Entering the church building**

Here are some practical Biblical suggestions on how to enter the church:

### **1. Be Friendly**

Be friendly to your brothers and sisters and encourage each other. As you are waiting for the meeting to start and you see someone you don't know who might be a visitor go and introduce yourself to them and welcome them.

### **2. Sit nearer the front than the back**

This is a good general rule to adopt, unless there are good sensible reasons for not doing so.

### **3. Be on time**

Always attempt to be on time. There is no excuse for always being late. If you've prepared well this will not be a problem. We have a coffee bar available before the meeting and it is a good time to get to know people.

### **4. Enter with faith**

Come with excitement and anticipation, believing that God is going to bless you. This again will be aided by good preparation. Come believing

(NT) Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

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## **5. ENTER WITH PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING**

(OT) Psalm 100:4 tell us to, 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!'

You should arrive at church with a determination to praise and thank God. As well as being a command, praise and thanksgiving is something that should naturally flow from within us in response to the goodness of God in our lives. Praise will also prepare us to hear from God. (OT) Psalm 33:1, 147:1, (NT) 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 13:5.

### **During the service**

How should we conduct ourselves during the service? What type of things should you be seeking to do? How should we act? What should your attitude be? Here are some suggestions:

#### **1. GIVE FULL ATTENTION**

Concentrate! It's amazing what we fail to hear or understand simply because we do not listen. Make every effort to stop your mind wandering. Sing from your heart not just your lips.

#### **2. BE A PARTICIPATOR NOT A SPECTATOR**

Don't sit on the sidelines, enter in! As already seen, you go to church primarily to give not receive. Be a part of the meeting not an onlooker. It's only as we enter in and give that we receive. Church is not a good spectator sport - it's very different when you join in.

#### **3. RELAX, GOD LOVES YOU**

Our gatherings together for worship should not be tense affairs. Church is to be enjoyed. Our services should be uplifting experiences. God is not out to get you, He loves you, so relax and enjoy your relationship with Him and with Gods 'people. We are family.

#### **4. TAKE - MAKE NOTES**

If you feel God is speaking to you, showing you something, or you hear something that you feel will help you in the future, make a note of it. God can reveal something to you in all kinds of different ways, e.g. - a prophecy, a song, a testimony etc., and of course through the preaching.

### **After the service**

If you are not careful it is possible to lose all that God has said and done in a meeting by acting and speaking carelessly once the meeting has finished. Here are three simple suggestions that will help you retain God's blessing:

#### **1. DON'T GOSSIP**

This is wrong at the best of times, but it is particularly out of place after a service of worship. Don't gossip away the blessing.

#### **2. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER**

As you leave be friendly, positive and helpful. Encourage each other in word and deed.

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### 3. APPLY WHAT GOD HAS SAID

Be determined to work out and apply what God has revealed to you during the church service. Apply it to your own life - work out your faith. (NT) James 1:22-25, 2:14-19) Unless you apply God's Word to your daily life it will not benefit you at all. So, don't lose or abuse it, but instead use it and do it!

#### **A Prayer**

*Thank you Father for the church. Thank you for showing me how important it is for me to be a part of the church family. Help me not to sit on the sidelines and be a spectator but help me to get involved in the life of the church. Make me a blessing and an encouragement to you and my fellow brothers and sisters. Help me to serve you in whatever way I can so that in all I do, our church and my part in it, will bring honour and glory to your name. **Amen.***

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# 8: THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Acts 1:8*

*'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'*

Part of the 'package deal' of salvation is what most 'Pentecostals' call the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit'. This is God's way of placing you in the realm of spiritual power so that you can enjoy the new life He has given you and also be effective messengers in transmitting the gospel to others. The Greek word that is often used when talking about the power of the Holy Spirit means, 'dynamite.' The Holy Spirit is God's dynamite!

## **The Holy Spirit is a Person**

Throughout the Bible we have many, many references to the Holy Spirit. It is always through the Holy Spirit that God achieves His purposes. The Holy Spirit is very active and prominent in all that God does. The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Counsellor, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Christ and often just, the Spirit. The word 'Spirit' must not cause you to think that the Holy Spirit is a force or power, because He is not. He is a person and He is part of the trinity - He is God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said this in (NT) John 15:26 'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.'

Here are just some of the things the Bible says about the Holy Spirit.

- He helps us live for God.
- He can be lied against.
- He can be grieved.
- He helps us praise God and glorify Jesus.
- He convicts people of sin.
- He speaks.
- He inspired the Bible and helps us understand it.
- He guides us through life
- We are born again by the Spirit.

Here are two examples of what the Holy Spirit will do for you.

- From (NT) Luke 12:11-12 Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will help us and defend us when we find ourselves in difficult situations and we don't know what to say. During these times, 'the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.'
- From (NT) Romans 8:26 we are told that He will help us when we don't know how to pray, He will 'intercede for us with groans that words cannot express.'

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## The Holy Spirit produces Fruit

When you were 'born again' the Holy Spirit was very involved. In fact (NT) John chapter 3 tells us that all those who are Christians were born again by the Spirit of God.

(NT) 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Titus 3:5.

Other verses in the Bible make it very clear that when you became a Christian the Holy Spirit automatically comes to live within you. Here are some examples:

*Romans 8:9*

*'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.'*

*1 Corinthians 3:16*

*'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?.'*

See also (NT) Romans 8:11, 15 & 16, Galatians 4:6, 1 John 3:24, 4:13.

Because the Holy Spirit lives with you, and if you choose to follow His desires you will produce the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit are the characteristics God is pleased with and wants to see in us. But if you do not follow His desires you will produce sinful characteristics. The decision is yours! You are actually a walking battle ground! Two powers are fighting for control of your life - and you choose which side wins. The passage that describes this is found in (NT) Galatians 5:16-26. To understand this, you need to turn to it and notice the following.

The two forces at work in us are our sinful nature and the Holy Spirit

Because you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives in you and is working in your life, but because you are a human being, the 'old you' - sinful nature, still causes you some trouble. If you follow the desires of your sinful nature the type of things that it will produce are: (19-21) sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

What this is saying is that if a person is continually and always living this way it proves they are not really a Christian and therefore will not inherit God's kingdom. John put it very clearly in his epistle:

*1 John 3:6,9*

*'No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.'*

*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.'*

It is important that whenever you do any of these things you repent immediately.

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How contrasted is what the Holy Spirit provides in us: (NT) Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.

God wants to develop your Christian character; He does this as you follow or walk in the Spirit. It's a bit like a tug of war, with the Spirit on one side and your old sinful nature on the other. You are in the middle! The Spirit is stronger, but you must agree to go His way and say No to your sinful nature. These qualities grow in your life as you develop as a Christian.

Every day you need to pray something like this: *'Lord I agree to let your Holy Spirit work in and through me today to produce those qualities that are pleasing to you. In Jesus Name. Amen.'*

### **The Holy Spirit gives Power**

Even though the Holy Spirit was central to you becoming a Christian and experiencing God's pardon and forgiveness, and even though every Christian has the Holy Spirit living in him to produce fruit, the Bible clearly shows that there is another, separate activity of the Holy Spirit for you to experience, i.e. - the power of the Holy Spirit. We all need the power of the Holy Spirit to help us live a more victorious and powerful Christian life. Even Jesus needed the power of the Holy Spirit:

### **The Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus**

In (NT) Luke 3:21-22 just before Jesus begins His public ministry, He is baptised in the river Jordan and afterwards the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove rests on him

When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

Before Jesus begins His ministry the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon Him. The power of the Holy Spirit was vital if He was going to be able to preach, teach and heal. If Jesus who is God, needed the power of the Holy Spirit to be effective in His ministry, how much more do we?

In (NT) Luke 4:14 we read that Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit

In v17-21 He goes to the synagogue and stands up and reads from (OT) Isaiah 61:1-2. He then sits down and proclaims that these words are about Him - (v20-21).

If you try to live your Christian life in your own strength you will fail.

The New Testament church also needed the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Holy Spirit in the Early Church**

There are many verses and passages throughout the New Testament and particularly in the Acts of the Apostles that describe the power of the Holy Spirit at work. The Bible reveals that the early church was operating in great power through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Most of the verses are from (NT) the book of Acts.

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(NT) Acts 5:12-16 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No-one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. 15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

What a tremendous picture of a powerful church, and as we will see this occurred after the coming of the Holy Spirit. The early church were operating and moving in the power of the Holy Spirit and as a result they were seeing and experiencing some incredible things taking place - miracles, healings, wonders, deliverance and most importantly people believing and becoming Christians. Some other exciting examples can be found in (NT) Acts 3:1-10, 5:12-24, 8:26-40, 9:32-43, 12:1-10, 13:1-12, 14:8-9, 16:16-34, 19:11-20, 20:7-12.

In (NT) 1 Thessalonians 1:5 Paul described it this way: 'our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with POWER, with THE HOLY SPIRIT and with deep conviction.'

In (NT) Hebrews 2:3-4 the writer describes it this way: 'How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.'

## **The promise of the Holy Spirit**

Before Jesus returned back to the Father He promised that after He had gone He would send them the Holy Spirit. In (NT) Luke 24:49 Jesus tells them to wait in the city, 'until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

(NT) Acts 1:3 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

As already explained, every Christian has the Holy Spirit and has been born of the Spirit, something that happens automatically when you become a Christian. But we also need to be baptised (immersed) with the Holy Spirit. Being baptised with the Holy Spirit is an entry into the power of God, it makes it possible for you to experience a deeper dimension of God's power in your life. It enables you to live an effective and powerful life for God. He gives you power to be a witness to others.

In (NT) Acts 2:1-21 we read about what happened on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and the disciples were filled with him.

This tells us what happens when a person is baptised with the Holy Spirit. It tells us how a person can definitely know they have been baptised with the Holy Spirit.

There are three other occasions in the Acts of the Apostles where we are given clear accounts of what happened when people were baptised with the Holy Spirit.



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- The first one is found in (NT) Acts 10:44-46. This passage tells us that when the Holy Spirit was poured on these Gentiles (non-Jews), 'they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.'
  - The second passage is found in (NT) Acts 11:15-17.
  - The third example is found in (NT) Acts 19:6.

In each incident we discover that when people were filled with the Holy Spirit there was one recurring phenomenon which was accepted as the sign that someone had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was the speaking in tongues.

According to (NT) Acts 2 :38-39, this experience is for anyone who has "repented." It is a promise for, 'all whom the Lord our God shall call.' (i.e. - have been saved, repented, believed etc.)

This experience is for all Christians, not just a select few. God promised, 'I will pour out my Spirit on ALL people.' (NT) Acts 2:17.

## **Tongues**

The gift of tongues may seem rather weird and pointless. You can read more about it in (NT) 1 Corinthians 14. It is a sign of the coming (baptism) of the Holy Spirit, it can be a great help in personal prayer, it can be spoken out in a meeting and someone may interpret (another gift) and you might sometimes hear people singing in tongues. So what's the point of it? The tongue is the hardest part of the body to control (N.T) James 3:7-8. God wants to demonstrate His mighty power in you by tackling the toughest part first. So expect to speak in tongues when you receive the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter proclaimed, 'The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for ALL WHOM THE LORD OUR GOD WILL CALL.' (NT) Acts 2:39. That means it's for YOU!

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is for all believers. You can experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you!

Have you received (been baptised) in the Holy Spirit?

## **You need to receive the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit needs to be received. Just as Jesus needed the power of the Holy Spirit to do His work and just as the early Christians needed that power, so today, every Christian needs the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's work

## **How to receive the Holy Spirit**

Here are some of the important keys to receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

## **You need to Obey**

You need to do what the Lord says. (NT) Acts 5:32 shows us we must obey to receive the Holy Spirit, (NT) Acts 5:32 'We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.'

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There needs to be a level of obedience in your life. You must be seeking to live for God and obey His commands. It is helpful therefore to ask the Lord to cleanse you from all outstanding sin so that you can approach Him with confidence. In other words, you need to clear your conscience. (NT) Acts 24:16.

If God wants you to do something, but you won't do it, or if you are habitually doing something that you know is wrong - then God may withhold this blessing from you. You need to ask God's forgiveness and turn away from that which is wrong.

(NT) Ephesians 4:30 says: 'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.'

### **You need to ASK**

It's important to ask Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NT) Luke 11:13 'If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

### **You need to THIRST - DESIRE**

On one occasion when Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit He used water and thirst to illustrate the fact that we must have a desire if we are to receive the Holy Spirit The passage where He spoke about this is found in (NT) John 7:37-39.

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

A real thirsty person will give anything for a drink.

We all know what it's like to be thirsty in the natural. Here Jesus says that we have to have the same desire spiritually if we are to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Psalmist put it like this in (OT) Psalm 63:1: 'O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water'.

### **You need to BELIEVE**

If you have a real desire you must ask with faith - you must believe that He will answer your prayer, after all as we have seen, He has promised He will do (NT) See Luke 11:13 above.

In (NT) Matthew 21:22 Jesus says:

'And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.'

In (NT) Mark 11:24 Jesus again says:

'Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours'.

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In other words, if you are to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit you must believe you have received your request when you pray.

### **You need to APPROPRIATE**

Having prayed, and believing God has heard and answered your prayer, you should now in faith receive. Begin to praise God out loud and expect to receive a new language (tongue) with which you can glorify God. Allow the streams of living water to flow from within you and out of you. Open your mouth and speak out the words that come from deep within you.

Having prayed and believed - receive the Holy Spirit. What you need to understand is that God does the filling, you do the speaking.

If you have prayed and believed, then you need to accept that God has answered your prayer, He has filled you with the Holy Spirit. What you need to do now is speak out those inarticulate sounds that form in your mind - by faith speak them out. God is not going to waggle your tongue for you, He is not going to make you speak - you must speak.

This is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost in (NT) Acts 2. In Acts 2:8 we are told that, 'All of them were FILLED with the Holy Spirit and BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER TONGUES as the Spirit enabled them.'

What you say at first will possibly seem strange to you, but eventually it will flow even though you don't know what you are saying (NT) 1 Corinthians 14:2. This isn't a language you've learnt like French. It's a spiritual language that expresses what's in your heart, as such, it might sound like nonsense syllables.

When the Lord baptises you in the Holy Spirit you can, and will, speak in other tongues, provided you don't let prejudice and fear hinder you. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, He will prompt you to speak as you yield to His direction. Your own natural words will at times seem inadequate to praise God the way you'd like to. The Holy Spirit will lead you and encourage you (but never force you) to speak out in tongues. So speak it out loud - nowhere in the Bible do we read they whispered tongues. Even if it sounds ridiculous, in faith believe it is from God, because it is. (NT) Luke 11:13.

In this way you'll experience for yourself what happened at the beginning at Pentecost. Henceforth there will be no doubts as to whether or not you have received the Spirit!

### **What other blessings does the Holy Spirit bring?**

Being baptised in the Holy Spirit has many benefits. Without going into great detail, here are some of them.

#### **He enables you to pray in the Spirit and sing praise in the Spirit**

The baptism in the Spirit makes it possible for supernatural communication (in tongues) to take place as distinct from the normal prayer and praise expressed in ordinary language. In this way you are able to express yourself to God supernaturally. (NT) - Acts 10:46, Romans 8:26-27, 1 Corinthians 14:14-15.

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## **He is a means of personal and private edification**

As you exercise this gift personally and privately, you will be edified (strengthened, built up, encouraged). Even when you are in the depths of despair and gloom, your inner man will be strengthened and edified.

## **He enables you to experience a new dimension of power and boldness**

When a person is baptised in the Holy Spirit a new power is experienced. This is what Jesus said would happen and when the early church experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit this is exactly what did happen. No longer were they hiding in fear, now they were out in the open, boldly declaring and demonstrating the gospel - they were even ready to die for the cause. (NT) Acts 1:8, 2:14-41, 3:1-26, 4:18-21, 31-33, etc. You can read through almost every chapter in the Acts of the Apostles and you will see the incredible power and boldness that the early church operated in.

## **The Holy Spirit gives gifts**

Another benefit of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is that it opens up a whole new dimension of spiritual life and power. It is not a goal; it is a gateway - a gateway to a whole new dimension of supernatural activity so that you become eligible for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You now become a prepared vessel so God can use you to operate in the gifts of the Spirit as He chooses.

One of the ways in which Jesus continues His work here on earth is through His body, the church - through every Christian. Every Christian has a vital part to play in representing the Lord Jesus. If we are to do this effectively, we need to be able to do the things Jesus did when He was on the earth. This is why the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit' are so important. These gifts are not natural gifts, such as music or art, although the Holy Spirit will and does certainly use these abilities or talents when a Christian makes them available to God. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural gifts and abilities given by God to accomplish His purpose here on earth. All of these gifts are mentioned in (NT) 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Read this passage and see if you can identify how many gifts there are.

(NT) 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, 'All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.'

## **An on-going experience and way of life**

Receiving the Holy Spirit is only the start. The Bible commands you to be continually filled with the Spirit. The initial receiving of the Holy Spirit, or baptism in the Spirit, is a once-for-all experience, whereas being filled with the Spirit is meant to be something ongoing - a way of life.

(NT) Ephesians 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Literally, this is saying, 'Go on continually being filled with the Spirit.' Paul gives us a clue about how we can do this. He contrasts the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives with the influence of alcoholic drink. While the two are opposite, there are parallels, too. The drunkard is a habitual drinker who becomes controlled by drink. Every aspect of his life is influenced by it - his behaviour, family life, job, driving, finances, etc. In a similar way, the Spirit-filled person is dominated by the influence of God's Holy Spirit in every area of his life.

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How does a drunkard stay drunk? He keeps drinking! And you stay filled with the Spirit by being every day alert to His presence and letting Him fill your life. You yield to His influence by feeding on God's Word, by prayer, by speaking in tongues, thanksgiving, worship, and fellowship with other Christians.

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# 9: YOU AND YOUR BODY

*1 Corinthians 6:20*

*'For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.'*

*Romans 12:1*

*'I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.'*

Every single person alive today lives in a body. The Christian life is lived out in the real world in a real body. We communicate via our body. All we do whether it be speech or action is played out through our bodies. No wonder the Bible has a lot to say about how we live, how we speak and how we conduct ourselves in this earthly temple. The body is important.

Some teach that the body is a hindrance, tying us down to this material world, and that what matters is in the realm of the spirit, where we can soar away to higher things. But this is not biblical Christianity. The Bible teaches that the body is important.

## **Why is your Body Important?**

Here very quickly are some reasons why your body is important.

### **Because Jesus came in bodily form**

Jesus didn't come purely as a spirit being, but 'the "Word" became flesh.' (NT) John 1:14.

### **Because Jesus has a glorified body now**

After His resurrection Jesus didn't 'graduate' out of His body to some higher spirit-realm. He didn't become a ghost or some form of non-physical being. He still retained a real body!

In (NT) Luke 24:39 – Jesus said: 'Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do.'

Jesus proved convincingly that He was alive in a real body. The disciples saw Him and touched Him, unlike a ghost that you cannot touch.

The resurrection body did, however, have greater powers. He apparently had the ability, for example, to appear in a locked room without coming through the door. (NT) John 20:19-20, 26).

In this same resurrection body, He later ascended to the Father's presence. (NT) Acts 1:9-10.

He has the same body now.

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## **Because our bodies are 'temples of the Holy Spirit'**

(NT) 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

A temple is a special and honoured place where a God dwells. Our bodies are important and worthy of great honour because the Holy Spirit of God has chosen to live there.

## **Because Scripture assumes that we care for our bodies**

To give attention to your body is not a waste of time. It's natural and proper - even animals look after their bodies. Paul put it this way in (NT) Ephesians 5:28-29: 'Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it.'

## **Because Jesus' healing ministry confirmed the body's value**

A large part of Jesus' public ministry was devoted to restoring sick and ailing bodies to healthy normality. His ministry was not just a ministry of 'saving souls.' He addressed the needs of the whole person, the body included. In (NT) Acts 10:38 we read two things that Jesus did.

(NT) Acts 10:38 He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

## **Because our eternal state is to be a bodily one**

Your ultimate destiny, at Christ's return, is to have a resurrection body like His. This transformation that will take place is written about by Paul in (NT) Romans 8:23 we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

## **The body's needs and drives**

Until this transformation takes place your body's needs and drives are all God-given and therefore good. They are:

### **HUNGER AND THIRST**

A healthy appetite, and good food to satisfy it, is one of God's great ideas. (OT) Psalm 107:9.

### **THE SEX DRIVE**

Sex was one of God's gift before the fall when Jesus told Adam and Eve to, 'be fruitful and increase in number.' (OT) Genesis 1:27-28. The sex drive was given not only for procreation but also for pleasure in the sealing of love and commitment between a husband and a wife. In (OT) Song of Songs this whole book is about the beautiful picture of the physical side of love and its sensual words applaud sexuality as part of God's wonderful creation. Another example is found in (OT) Proverbs 5:18-19 where the Bible is very graphic about this pleasure. ('fountain' means the body parts that produce life).

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## **SLEEP AND REST**

Sleep and rest is the divinely-appointed means by which we recover from the exertion of daily living. There are many, many verses we could look at that declare this - for example (OT) Psalm 4:8, 23:2. This is one of the reasons why God initiated the Sabbath, i.e. - the need to have at least one day off in a week for rest, relaxation and worship.

## **EXERCISE**

Movement and action are the natural outworking of a healthy body, especially when the blessing of God puts a spring in the step.

### **Self-control by the Holy Spirit**

While it's true that all these physical drives are God-given and good, they can quickly get out of hand if not kept in check. They then become a means by which sin can take hold. The best prevention against bodily excess is the development of the spiritual side of your being. (NT) Galatians 5:16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

Only when the impulses of the soul (mind, will and emotions) and body are kept subservient to your spiritual drive will you enjoy true freedom in living. Paul saw the importance of self-control in this area when he said in (NT) 1 Corinthians 9:27: 'I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize'.

How, in practice, can you exercise this self-control? What does it mean to 'beat 'your body and make it your slave? For starters - it does not mean literally beat your body up because it's bad and deserves it. I know that sounds crazy - but you'd be surprised how many have read it that way and brought their body great discomfort in an attempt to bring it under control. Paul is NOT suggesting that for one moment.

It will include:

### **Right eating and drinking, and fasting**

#### **A BALANCED DIET**

You need a balanced diet for good health. There's plenty of literature available to point you in the right direction without making you a food faddist.

#### **MODERATION**

You should eat and drink in moderate quantities, in keeping with your workload and metabolism. (OT) Proverbs 23:20-21 says: 'Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags'.

As we have already seen in a previous chapter, (NT) Ephesians 5:18 teaches us that the key to avoiding bodily excess is being filled with the Holy Spirit. If you're filled with the Spirit, part of whose fruit is self control (NT) Galatians 5:23, you'll be able to exercise restraint.



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## **FASTING**

Fasting is an excellent way of showing your body who's boss. But when you fast always fast with a specific purpose and include prayer. Biblical fasting is prayer and fasting. So if you decide to miss lunch once a week, for example, be sure to spend the lunch break in purposeful prayer, and/or Bible meditation. From (NT) Matthew 6:6 & 16 we see Jesus assumed we would fast.

The Bible assumes that we will fast from time to time. In both these verses Jesus said 'when'(not 'if') you fast. Jesus also said that when you personally fast you should do it privately and not let everyone know what you are doing.

## **Sexual restraints**

God is not against sex - He created it and as already explained, He didn't create it just for procreation but also for our enjoyment. But God did put clear boundaries and guidelines for this. Unfortunately, the world sees it as normal to be sexually promiscuous. But in His love and grace, God only permits sexual expression within the commitment of the marriage bond. (NT) 1 Corinthians 7:2 says: 'Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband'.

The Bible clearly shows that sex is to be between a man and a woman only. This is a subject that the Bible has lots to say about, and it needs to be considered and looked at separately from this one. In the meantime, God's Word to you is, 'Keep yourself pure.' (NT) 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 13:4.

## **An ordered life**

If your life is to be a fulfilling one, then you need to use your time wisely. This means balancing out all the demands of our life so that you find time for relaxation, work, family and of course God. We all have the same amount of time - 24 hours a day, 168 hours per week, 10,080 minutes per week, over half a million seconds per week and 8,760 hours per year - it's how we use it that counts.

Sleep is a gift from God, and you need relaxation to function efficiently. But unless you take care, it's all too easy to lapse into idleness and time-wasting. Discover your sleep requirements and, as far as possible, tailor the rest of your life accordingly. If, out of twenty-four hours, you sleep eight and work eight, that still leaves you eight to organise - more than enough time to do all you want to do. Plan these precious eight hours to the best advantage.

(NT) Colossians 4:5-6 Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.

(OT) Psalm 90:12 Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.

Set goals in every area of your life. Check periodically how well you are succeeding in ordering your life in balanced way so that time is found for all the important aspects of your life. Don't let the TV or even your work rule your life. Exert mastery of your use of time.

## **Fitness and grooming**

Mind, emotion and spirit, functions best in a healthy body. Since normal living today fails to keep us physically fit, you need to build some kind of exercise into your personal schedule.

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(NT) 1 Timothy 4:8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

(NT) 1 Corinthians 6:20 you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body.

It goes without saying that smoking and illicit drug-taking should not have a place in your life as a Christian. They definitely offer no benefit whatever and are proven dangers to good health. We should do all we can to prevent polluting the temple of the Holy Spirit with such activities.

Proper attention to personal hygiene and good grooming will add the finishing touches of proper self-respect to you as a man or woman of God who's healthy in spirit, soul and body.

### **Appearance and mannerism**

Today we live in a day where anything seems to be acceptable. In today's society where God's teaching on sexuality has been turned upside down it is important we remain loyal to God's ideal. It is important that your appearance and mannerism express your sexual identity. The blurring of the difference between the sexes so common in our generation is strongly opposed by the teaching of Scripture.

For example, (OT) Deuteronomy 22:5. A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.

This does not mean a woman cannot wear trousers, or a trouser suit or a Scotsman should not wear a kilt, but rather it is to warn against the onset of transvestism or similar sexual perversion. In general, if you're a man, aim to look like and act like a man: if you're a woman aim to look like a woman and do not be ashamed of your feminine nature and personality.

Remember, you're God's shop-window to the world. People can't see into your mind or spirit; all they can see is your outward appearance. So let them see something that commends the Lord.

(NT) 1 Corinthians 6:20 'You were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body'.

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# 10:WITNESSING - Telling Others

*Mark 1:17*

*Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'*

*Acts 1:8*

*'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'*

What is the purpose of the church? There are many answers to that question, e.g. worship, Bible teaching, fellowship, prayer, service etc., and as we have already seen, the church and your involvement in it is vitally important.

Another reason for the church and another vital aspect of our Christian life is that you and I might share the good news with others. In fact, this is one of the main reasons why God has left us here on earth and not already taken us to be with Him.

But why should you and I tell others about Jesus?

## **Four reasons we should tell others about Jesus**

### **1: Because Jesus has told us to**

Now that's the very best reason right at the start.

From the verses highlighted above you will see two things that Jesus said to His disciples.

From (N.T) Mark 1:17 Jesus said they were going to become 'fishers of men'

These were some of the first words Jesus said to His disciples. Here He tells them, four of which were fisherman by trade, that instead of catching fish they were now going to be fishing for men. (See also Luke 5:1-11)

In (N.T) Acts 1:8 we have the very last words that Jesus spoke to the disciples. Jesus said the disciples were to be 'witnesses'.

So Jesus' first and last words to His disciples highlight the importance and the duty we all have to win others by sharing the gospel with them, by being His witnesses.

A witness is a person who gives evidence from personal experience. He speaks about what he has seen, heard or knows. Jesus has called us to be witnesses - to give evidence for Him.

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(NT0 Acts 1:8 not only tell us what we're supposed to do; it also tells us where we're supposed to do it. 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

What does this mean? Are you supposed to get on a plane and go over to Israel to share your faith? No. Remember when the disciples were hearing these words from Jesus, where were they? They were in Jerusalem.

### **Here's the point - Start where you are**

What's your Jerusalem? It's your family, your friends, and co-workers. That's your Jerusalem. You start with the people closest to you. You start with the people in your own sphere of reference. What's your Judea? Judea is like the county you live in. What is your county? There are many, many people in the county you live and many of them still need to hear the Good News.

What's your Samaria? That's like the county next door. You don't have to go very far to find your Samaria. It's right next door.

But what about going to the ends of the earth - how can you do this? For hundreds of years, Christian's found this part much harder to obey - because the ability to travel was extremely limited. In fact, for many years the human race didn't even know the world was round. But today, there are many opportunities for believers to go on short-term trips that lead them to the, 'ends of the earth' and of course many nations come to us.

This is the point - you don't have to go very far to find your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria or even go to the ends of the earth. It's where you are at a particular time.

Jesus said in (N.T) Luke 19:10, 'For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost.' In (N.T) John 17:18 Jesus prayed, 'As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.' In other words, our priority as the people of God is to have the same priority Jesus had during His ministry. He said in, (N.T) John 20:21, 'As the Father has sent me, I also send you.'

Other verses where Jesus commands us to tell others about Him include (N.T) - Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-47.

As Christians we are called to tell others about the Good News, we are to be His witnesses. Witnessing does not mean you have to be a theological expert. It simply means you have to share what God is doing in your life. When you talk about what God's done in your life, you are stating that you're a satisfied customer!

Who has more credibility - a paid salesman or the satisfied customer? Nobody else can share your witness - if you don't, nobody else will.

## **2: Because people are lost without God**

The Bible makes it very clear that those who refuse to accept God's salvation are going to a lost eternity without God. (NT) 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

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(NT) Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'

Jesus made this very clear in (NT) Matthew 10:32-33 that the person who fails to acknowledge Jesus will be lost eternally: 'Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven'.

In (NT) John 14:6 we read that there are no ways to God apart from Jesus. Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'

(NT) James 5:20 tells us that, 'Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.'

Since we are aware of the plight of our fellow men, it is our responsibility to warn them of the danger they are in. In (OT) Proverbs 24:11 we are told to: 'Rescue those being led astray to death. Hold back those staggering towards slaughter.'

### **3: Because Jesus is the giver of life.**

It's only in Jesus Christ that a person can experience eternal life.

(NT) John 3:14-16 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

This is what Jesus said in John 11:25: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'

The Gospel doesn't just save a person from a life without God and give Him eternal life in the future, it also provides a person with a better life now.

(NT) John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Jesus offers peace, joy, happiness, deliverance, healing, provision....and more! We have good news to share with people. In (NT) 1 John 5:12 we are told that, 'he who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.'

### **4: Because now is the day of salvation**

(NT) 2 Cor 6:2 For he says, 'In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.'

(NT) James 4:14 tell us that, 'we do not even know what will happen tomorrow.'

(NT) Matthew 24:36 tells us that only the Father knows when Jesus is going to return again.

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The sobering truth is that the only day a person has to accept Jesus Christ is right now. No-one (except God) knows when our life on this earth will come to an end and no-one (except God) knows when Jesus is going to return again. This should cause us to be urgent about telling others about Jesus. There is no time to waste, you must grasp every opportunity you have to tell others about Jesus and to be His witness. Jesus highlighted this in (NT) John 4:35 when He said: 'Do not say, four months more and then the harvest? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.'

There is one part of your life's mission that we all have in common. It's this, God wants you to tell other people about what's happened to you. He wants you to be His witness. He wants you to share the Good News.

## **Five things a good witness needs**

To be a good witness there are certain things that are going to help you. Some of these you should already have, others you may have to work on. The first one you should have is:

### **1: A personal experience of the Lord Jesus**

One thing that you must have is a personal experience of Jesus Christ. This is possibly the most powerful method of witnessing - your own personal testimony. You may not be a great debater, or know lots of facts, but if you have a personal experience of Jesus Christ you have a story to tell.

In (NT) John 9 we have the story of the blind man who was healed by Jesus. The Pharisees asked him a lot of questions he couldn't answer. But there was one thing he knew without any shadow of a doubt. (NT) John 9:25 .... 'One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!'

### **2: The fullness of the Holy Spirit**

As we have already noted in a previous chapter (Number 8), and also in this one, one of the reasons for the Holy Spirit is so that we can have power to be witnesses. (NT) Acts 1:8.

A good way to illustrate this is to see our lives as an empty glove. On its own it can do very little. But with a hand inside the glove we can do many things. The hand is like the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit inside you, working with you and through you, you will experience His power and His help.

### **3: A knowledge of the Bible**

You need to be ready to share the Good News with others. You need to pray for your friends, family, workmates etc. - that God will speak to them. You also need to pray for opportunities to talk to people about Jesus. Look for these 'divine appointments' as they arise and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you in conversation.

Something else that is going to help you to be ready to talk to others about Jesus is a knowledge of the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that: 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

If you are to be a good witness, you need to be growing in your knowledge of the Bible. Many of the answers to the questions you will be asked can be found in the Bible.

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(NT) 1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Gentleness and respect are two extremely important qualities when sharing your faith with someone.

Try to avoid too much religious language and jargon - explain unfamiliar words as you talk. When possible use the Bible to back up what you are saying.

### ***Useful Verses***

Underline these verses in your Bible, learn them and keep a note of them in the cover of your Bible.

1. The problem:

(OT) - Isaiah 53:6 & 59:2 - Sin separates.

(NT) - Romans 3:23 & 6:23 - Sin's penalty.

2. God's remedy:

(NT) - 1 Peter 2:24 & 3:18 - Jesus died for us.

3. Our response:

(NT) - Acts 2:38 & 3:10 - Repent.

(NT) - John 1:12 & 3:16 - Believe and receive.

### ***Useful Passages***

(OT) - Psalm 103 - God's love, compassion and forgiveness.

(NT) - Acts 1:34-43 - Summary of the life and work of Jesus.

(NT) - Luke 15:11-32 - Parable of the lost Son (The Prodigal).

(NT) - John 3:1-21 - Be born again.

Other things you might want to do to help your friends and family members come to a knowledge of salvation is to invite them to social events where they will meet other Christians. Also invite them to church meetings where they will hear the gospel presented in a clear and relevant way. Give them good Christian books, booklets, leaflets or tapes that communicate the gospel, so that they can think about things further on their own.

## **4: A Christ like love and compassion**

In the heart of every true Christian there should be a real compulsion, a desire, a burden to tell others about Jesus. What Jesus has done for you, the love you have discovered and experienced should motivate you to share this with others.

Paul writes in (NT) 1 Cor 9:16 Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!

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(NT) 2 Cor 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

As a Christian we should be motivated by Christ's love. If the Holy Spirit is working in your life, then God's love (the fruit of the Spirit) will create within you a love for those who are lost. Do you have a desire to tell others about Jesus? Are you concerned about people finding Jesus? Do you have a compassion and a love for those who are lost? When the love of God is motivating us in what we say, how we say things and what we do, this will have an impact on those we are trying to reach.

### **5: An ability to lead someone to Christ**

To be an effective witness you need to be ready to lead someone to Christ. If in the course of you telling someone about Jesus it becomes clear that they are ready to become a Christian, you need to know how to lead them to Christ. Would you know how to do this?

## **HOW TO LEAD SOMEONE TO CHRIST?**

### **1. Make sure they understand what they are doing**

Clearly explain to them that they need to make a decision to become a Christian. Explain about the problem of sin, God's remedy and that in order to become a Christian they must repent, believe and receive. If you have a Bible turn to some of the Bible verses that explain this.

### **2. Encourage them to pray aloud a prayer of confession and commitment**

If possible a good way to do this is for you to lead them in prayer, getting them to repeat it after you - they may have never prayed aloud before! Before you do pray emphasise that they need to be sincere and believe what they are praying. In this prayer make sure they repent, thank God for dying for them and invite Jesus into their life as Lord, Master and friend. (A good example of the type of prayer to pray can be found at the end of the first chapter in this course, i.e. – 'Becoming a Christian.')

### **3. Encourage them to pray and read the Bible every day and to join a Bible believing church where they will be looked after in their Christian life.**

If possible and if appropriate encourage them to go to the church you go to. This way you can accompany them, encourage them and help them to grow in their Christian faith.

## **The best way to tell others about Jesus**

There are many ways we can tell others about Jesus, but when it comes to your personal witness there are basically three ways that are best. These apply to every single Christian - they apply to you and they apply to me. What are they?

### **By your words - what you say**

You can't be a 'silent witness'. If you don't speak about your faith people might just think that you are only a good person. They will only know you are a Christian by telling them. (NT) Mark 5:18-20 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. 19 But Jesus said, 'No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.'



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This is something Jesus told those He helped on a number of occasions - He told them to go and tell others what He had done for them. As we have already noted from (NT) 1 Peter 3:15 you must, 'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have.'

(NT) Rom 10:13-14 for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?'

(NT) 2 Cor 4:13 It is written: 'I believed; therefore, I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,

### **By your actions - what you do and how you live**

Someone once said, 'I can't hear what you are saying because of what you are.' In other words, our actions, the kind of life we live must match our words, otherwise our witness will not be taken seriously. We must show people we are Christians by the way we live - we are to be living examples of what a Christian is.

In (NT) Mathews 5:16 Jesus told us that people, 'praise your Father in heaven' if we let our lights shine by doing good.

If you are going to be a good witness, you must live a good life. In other words, it's not just saying you're a Christian, it's also living like a Christian! Your actions must SHOW you are a Christian!

If we claim to be Christians but fail to back it up in the way we live, people will be quick to point it out. Living up to our Christian standards is vital if you are to make an impression on those who are not Christians. You need to be careful about what you say, what you do and even the places where you go. In every area of your life you need to be attempting to set a good Christian example - in the home, at school, at work, in your neighborhood, among your friends and even among those who might be 'your enemies' whom Jesus told us to love and pray for. (NT) Matthew 5:43-48.

(NT) Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

What Christian qualities do you think will impress people?

### **By giving your testimony**

One of the most powerful ways of telling others about Jesus is to give your own personal testimony. It is something every Christian can and should engage in when the opportunity arises. Let me share with you **THE VALUE OF A TESTIMONY**.

### **IT IS PERSONAL**

As a Christian you have something no-one else can argue with. A sceptic may deny your doctrine, attack your church, but he cannot ignore the fact that your life has changed, been cleaned up and revolutionised. Your personal testimony is real and whatever people might think they can't really argue with it.

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## **IT STIMULATES INTEREST**

When people can see the change in your life, that creates interest especially among those who know you. This stimulates questions as to why you have changed, what has caused the change in your life. People are attracted to the human-interest story of how Mr. or Mrs. Public found peace within. Believe me, the steps that led to your conversion and the subsequent ramifications are far more appealing and appropriate to the lost than pulpit exposition of the gospel.

## **IT IS EFFECTIVE**

The personal testimony of a Christian is one of the most powerful methods of telling others about Jesus. This is one of the most convincing arguments about Christianity and the power of the gospel. No persuasive technique will ever take the place of your personal testimony. Many have been significantly impacted by the personal testimony of a Christian. In (NT) John 4:39 we are told that many people in one town believed in Jesus because of the testimony of one lady. This is what this verse says, 'Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I ever did.' If you have not discovered the value of telling others how God changed your life, you've missed out on a vital link in the chain of His plan for reaching the lost.

## **Asking the Right Questions**

How can you share Christ with a stranger? One way is to ask some questions. This is one of the ways Jesus shared the good news with others, He often began his conversation by asking questions. One of the classic examples is found in (NT) John 4.

The next time you have an opportunity, try one of these questions to get the conversation started.

- What is it that you believe the world needs more than anything else?
- Do you ever wish you could make a fresh start in life?
- What do you think people mean when they say they know God?

We need to be ready to share the gospel in every conversation as God gives us the opportunity.

## **HOW TO GIVE YOUR TESTIMONY?**

Your testimony is the evidence you have to give about what God has done in your life. It falls into three Sections.

### **1: BC - Before Conversion**

What your time was like before you became a Christian. This should be a simple and clear explanation of what your life was like and how you felt before becoming a Christian.

### **2: DC - During Conversion**

How you actually committed your life to Christ. What led to your decision? This should be an explanation of what brought you to Christ and how this actually happened. More important than the how is the why. Why did you become a Christian, and more to the point, why are you still following Jesus?

### **3: AC - After Conversion**

How has your life changed since? How is Jesus working in you and through you? What difference does being a Christian make in your life?

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## **SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT BE ASKED.**

Here are some questions that you could be asked. How would you answer them? As we think about this, jot down ideas of the answers you might give. If you need to, use an extra piece of paper.

- What is a Christian?
- How do you become a Christian?
- What difference has it made to your life?
- What would I have to do to become a Christian?

## **Helps and Hints - Things to Remember**

- Don't be judgmental in your communication.
- Listen as well as talk.
- Be truthful about your story. Tell about your struggles as well as your joys. Remember we are human and God has not finished with us yet.
- Don't argue. The idea is not to win an argument, but to share your testimony.
- Avoid using church jargon or religious language - this is generally not understood.
- Make eye contact.
- Speak clearly.
- Speak with confidence.

## **Your Personal Testimony**

It is a good exercise to write out your personal testimony. Use only about 150 words. Your story needs to be thought through so that it's clear in your mind, what you're saying, where you are going and who you are trusting.

## **PUTTING YOUR STORY TOGETHER**

To help you start thinking about how to give your testimony think about how you would answer the following questions.

- What were some of the problems and frustrations you had before you became a Christian?
- What were the reasons for you turning to Christ? What attracted you to Christ?
- What happened when you accepted Jesus Christ? Where were you? Did you pray? What did you pray?
- What's different now about your life?
- Why do you want your friends to know?

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# 11: KNOWING GOD'S WILL

*Psalm 25:4-5*

*"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me."*

*Ephesians 5:17*

*'Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.'*

Questions, choices, decisions, there are so many. Everyone of us is continually facing decisions. They are endless. Decisions about work, employment, family, marriage, finances, relationships, ministry, and plenty of others besides. Some may be considered mundane; others are looked upon as more important. The truth is we need guidance at all times. Whatever our circumstances we all constantly face decisions of different sorts in which we as Christians need to know the will of God.

How can you know and discover God's will in your life? How can you know what God wants you to do?

How does God guide, and how can you know He is guiding you?

In this chapter I want to give a broad outline of the main truths you need to apply if you are to discover and know God's will in your life.

## **Two truths you need to understand/accept**

The first truth you need to understand and accept is:

### **God wants to guide you**

(OT) Ps 32:8 The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.'

God doesn't simply save us and leave us to our own devices, to struggle through life on our own. No, He takes us by the hand and leads, directs and guides, and if we are willing to listen and follow we will continually know His help and blessing. One of the most important things a Christian can know about guidance is that God promises to guide us personally and that He's always true to His word. You and I can be sure of God's personal interest in us. (OT) Psalm 48:14, Isaiah 30:21, 58:11).

We see two things we should do and one thing we shouldn't do in the following verses.

(OT) Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

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## **You must be willing to accept God's will.**

It is very important that you understand that God has a plan and purpose for your life and that God's will is best. Many people think God's will is the worst possible thing that could happen to them! But God loves us and knows us so well that His way is always the best!

(NT) Rom 12:1-2 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

God knows what is best for you and He will lead you into all the good things He has for you if you will allow Him to. He is our shepherd, His desire is to lead, guide and directs us in every major decision we have to make.

The problem most people have however is - how? When you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit put within you a desire to please Him - to do His will in everything. The question is; how can you know what His will is? In other words, how can you receive His guidance?

### **Steps to finding out what God wants you to do**

When thinking about how God guides, there are some basic principles we need to understand and apply. Here then is a broad outline of the main ways God guides His children so that they can discover what He wants them to do.

### **Get to know Him better**

A businessman was boasting to a colleague about his secretary. 'Of course, she's been with me many years now,' he said. "She's got to know me and the way I like things done. So half the time I don't have to tell her what to do; she knows, and just gets on with it - a tremendous asset.'

The secretary knew the boss well because she knew him. And that's how it needs to be with you and God. Get to know him and most of the time you won't need to ask what His will is; you'll just know.

One of the best ways for getting to know Him better is prayer. Spending time with God every day in prayer and Bible reading are very important. Through them you'll get to know God better and begin to understand His will for your life. Every one of us should be able to spend at least 5-10 minutes every day specifically asking God to guide us, lead us, direct us. (OT) Psalm 5:8, 25:4-5, 27:11, 143:8 & 10.

(NT) James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Remember, being a Christian isn't primarily subscribing to a body of doctrine (important though that is). It's a relationship with the living Lord, one that keeps on growing. The Apostle Paul was a mature Christian leader but he could still say, 'I want to know Christ.' (NT) Philippians 3:10.

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So foster your relationship with Him and as you get to know Him better you'll discover His ways and His will for you.

## **The way things happen**

How things happen can be an indicator, or a confirmation that God is leading you in a certain direction. 'The way things happen' could also be described as, 'circumstances' or, 'open and closed doors.' The Bible gives us some examples of this. For example, in (NT) Acts 8 we read about how the gospel spread out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria.

Because of persecution and the scattering of the Christians, the gospel was able to be spread out from Jerusalem. God used these circumstances to reach Judea and Samaria. Sometimes God will use events and circumstances to confirm to you what He wants you to do or what He does not want you to do.

If it is God's will He can arrange events to make something possible without us having to force things.

## **Do whatever God wants**

Most of God's will for your life is revealed in the Bible. In many, many areas the Bible tells you what you should and what you shouldn't do. So many choices and decisions you will face are already settled in God's Word - the Bible. Here are some examples:

### ***Old Testament***

- Read the Scriptures (Psalm 1:2)

### ***New Testament***

- Obey Parents (Ephesians 6:1)
- Marry a Christian (2 Corinthians 6:15-16)
- Work at an occupation and do it well. (Ephesians 6:5-6, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)
- Support your family (1 Timothy 5:8)
- Give to the Lord's work and the poor (2 Corinthians 8:9 & Galatians 2:10)
- Rear children by God's standard (Ephesians 6:4)
- Pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Assemble for church worship (Hebrews 10:25)
- Share the Gospel with others (Acts 1:8)
- Be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)
- Have a spirit of gratitude (Philippians 4:6)
- Love one another (1 Corinthians 13)
- Accept people without prejudice (James 2:1-10)

These are just some of the things the Bible tells us we should do.

The 10 Commandments give us a whole list of others. (OT) Exodus 20:1-17.

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Here are some clear guidance verses in the Bible from the New Testament

- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 'It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable.'
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'
- 1 Peter 2:15 'It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.'

Before focusing on detailed questions like, "What of these two job-offers does the Lord want me to accept?" get a grasp of those statements of His will that are always true, regardless of our circumstances.

In addition to these clear and unequivocal commands of God's Word there are also the principles of God's Word that can help us to know what God wants us to do.

The Bible is a source-book where you can discover divine principles. Applying these principles especially in what might be called those 'grey or unclear' areas will help you come to a decision on God's will.

For example, the Bible doesn't mention smoking. It does, however, teach the principle that your body is holy - a temple of the Holy Spirit, in fact. So we can conclude from this that God's 'good, pleasing and perfect will' is for you to steer clear of smoking. This is applying the principles of God's Word to your decisions and actions.

If a Christian is considering the opportunity for employment in a betting office then the principles of God's Word should clearly indicate that this isn't acceptable because the whole framework of the Bible condemns the misuse of money and the importance of using it wisely.

## **Principles for living**

Some of the types of questions that can be good to ask when applying the principles of God's Word to a situation are:

Is it enslaving?...Is it harmful to my body? (NT) 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Will this practice cause another Christian to stumble? (NT) 1 Corinthians 8:13. Is it glorifying to God? (NT) 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Another good principle to adopt is - If in doubt, don't!

It's good to ask more mature Christians for advice too.

Finally, when thinking of the central role the Bible plays in decision making, always treat the Bible with respect! Please understand, and never forget, Scripture isn't a lucky dip. Letting the Bible fall open at random and expecting a verse from the page to be God's instant guidance for you isn't treating it with due respect.

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In every area of guidance the Bible must always come first.. Most questions about what you should do are in the Bible. No special guidance will be given when God's will is clearly laid out in the Bible. And no guidance, including all we have already looked at and have yet to look at will ever go against what the Bible says.

(OT) Ps 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

## **The peace of God**

God has placed His Holy Spirit inside you to direct you in your ways. You need to learn to listen to His inner voice. The way the Holy Spirit often does this is to give you a deep sense of peace, assurance or conviction that a particular course of action is right. Sometimes this might come suddenly, so that you suddenly know deep inside yourself exactly what He wants you to do. At other times this sense of peace, assurance and conviction about a decision might come over a period of time.

(NT) Col 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

The word, 'rule' literally means, 'be the umpire' and just as an umpire in sport decides the right course of action, what is right or wrong, so the 'peace of Christ' will do the same. The Message Version of the Bible translates this verse: 'And the peace of God, let it be acting as an umpire in your hearts.'

Let the 'peace of Christ' act as a referee in your heart. As you contemplate different options, go for the one that brings a feeling of deep inner peace to your spirit.

## **Be active for God**

(NT) Acts 16:6-10 Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

You can only guide a moving car and God can only guide and direct a moving Christian.

If you want God to guide you, you must be actively serving God in every way you can and in any way you can. Here is a very important Biblical principle you need to understand. It's called, 'getting stuck in' being available, having a go at anything, actively serving God to the best of your ability.

## **Use sanctified common sense**

For many of life's decisions you don't need guidance from God. God has given you a brain and He expects you to use it. Here are some amusing illustrations:

- If you're going from England to France on holiday, for instance, you don't need to pray about whether to take the ferry, the plane or the train via the channel tunnel. Simply look at the times and price, and make a sensible decision accordingly. Its all down to personal preference.



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- If you left school at 15 without any qualifications, it is unlikely that God wants you to be a brain-surgeon.
  - A young man, who was looking into a shop window wondering about what spanner to buy, was advised by his Pastor, 'buy the one the fits the nut.'

One of the basic, essential and practical ways in guidance is that you need to use your mind. We have to use our minds, think things through and come to a decision. Many Christians get into trouble precisely because they fail to grasp this practical truth and rely too much on other means of guidance. The book of Proverbs in the Bible is possibly the greatest commentary on wisdom, i.e. - using common sense. Proverbs advocates careful planning, the value of hard work, efficient time keeping, the need to ask the opinions of others, weighing carefully the consequences of our proposed actions, thinking before jumping, looking before leaping, knowing your place, the need for humility, guarding your tongue and the importance of avoiding temptation and folly.

Proverbs is all about taking decisions for ourselves wisely, with humility and prayer so that we might be open to God. It involves using our minds that God has not only given us but also renewed for us in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. (NT) Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 2:16.

### **The advice of others**

The Bible is very clear on the role others can play when seeking guidance. Listen to some of the words of Samuel the author of Proverbs - someone to whom God gave special wisdom:

- Proverbs 11:14 'Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety.'
- Proverbs 15:22 'Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.'

It doesn't follow, of course, that every such piece of advice will be God's will. But listen to each one and weigh it up in your heart, asking the Lord to make His will plain. Don't rule anyone out; God can speak even through non-Christians.

Two areas where we should particularly look for advice are:

1. Something heard in church. Listen to the preaching and be open for the Lord to speak directly to you through it. Listen also to any public prophecies that may be given, to testimonies, to readings from the Bible and to the words of songs. Any of these may become a vehicle by which God speaks to you.
2. Counsel from church leaders. Church leaders are some of the most important people you should ask advice from.

(NT) Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

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Your spiritual advisors are spiritually mature people and they will always be honest with you. If you want to know the will of God and what you should do, you need to accept that the advice of spiritual leaders is one of the ways for helping you in this. This is one of their responsibilities - to help people in their Christian life.

It's helpful before major important decisions to ask their advice.

### **Areas of concern**

There are two areas where God certainly can speak to you, but you need to handle them with caution if you're to avoid confusion. I will mention them briefly.

#### **'God has given me a word for you'**

Personal prophecies of this kind must be handled with great care. The Bible insists that all prophecy must be 'weighed' or assessed. (NT) 1 Corinthians 14:29. So be sure to ask advice from some other mature Christians.

### **Putting out a fleece, i.e. - Asking God for a sign to confirm what you should do**

In (OT) Judges 6:1-40 we have one of the clearest examples of a person asking God for a sign to confirm what God wanted him to do. His name was Gideon.

Gideon was a young Jew. He lived in Israel in difficult times, when Israel's enemies, the Midianites, had conquered the land. Judges 6 tells us how God sent an angel to call him to military leadership against the Midianites, and how Gideon, being just an ordinary farmer, could hardly believe it, so he asked God to give him a sign.

To discover God's will, Gideon put out a fleece (sheepskin) on the ground overnight. He said to God, 'If, in the morning, the fleece is wet and the earth around it is dry, I'll know you really do want me to lead Israel against her enemies.' In the morning the fleece was wet and the earth dry. But he still doubted, probably thinking, 'It was a foregone conclusion, because the fibres of the fleece hold the dew, whereas the earth quickly soaks it up.' So he swapped it round, 'If, in the morning, the fleece is dry and the earth around it is wet, then I'll know you have called me.' And so it was, so he became Israel's deliverer.

Because of this story people have built a superstructure concerning guidance, called, 'putting out a fleece.' Today some people use this experiment to come to a decision about whether God is guiding them or leading them in certain directions. Most people have possibly done this to some degree. Can you think of examples of how people might do this?

But should we do this? Should we ask for signs? Is it appropriate today? Here then are some guidelines to bear in mind.

#### **If you use a fleece (ask God for a sign) it needs to be supernatural.**

The fleece that Gideon used was of the miraculous kind. This is why he decided to swap it around, so that instead of the fleece being wet and the ground around it dry, he now asked for God to arrange for the ground to be wet and fleece dry. (v36-40) If you decide to ask God for a sign for guidance purposes, use one that cannot be interpreted other than it being of God.

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Make sure that any sign you ask God for, cannot be mistaken as anything else than God answering. If you don't do this, it's very easy to read into situations and see things that aren't really there.

**If you use a fleece (ask God for a sign) it needs to be a confirming and exceptional exercise.**

This seemed to be the case with Gideon. God had already spoken to him, but he still had a little doubt and possibly fear as well. His use of the fleece was a confirming matter. The problem today is that many Christians use this method to make a decision rather than for confirming a decision. Neither should it be something you should place too much weight upon - it should be used in rare and exceptional circumstances.

You may also face crucial decisions, but in virtually every case you'll probably be able to discover God's will without resorting to this type of approach. Use it only in the most serious circumstances, for the purpose of confirmation and only when every other means of discovering God's will have been tried and exhausted. In Gideon's day the Holy Spirit didn't live in all God's people the way He does now in you, and he did not have all the resources available to him like we do. Today, fleeces are less necessary.

**The Soldiers orders**

In military circles there are two kinds of orders issued to soldiers; Standing Orders and Daily Orders.

Standing Orders are permanently valid. They apply at all times and in all circumstances, setting basic standards of military behaviour and discipline, like, 'Always salute an officer.' For the Christian 'soldier', the standing orders are the clear teaching and commands of the Bible.

Daily Orders are posted on barracks notice boards each morning and will change from day to day. They concern the details of the day's work, saying who is on work-party etc. The Christian soldier receives his daily orders from the use of sanctified common sense and inner peace, from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If you're wondering for instance whether you should visit Aunt Mary, don't look for a Bible verse to tell you. Simply make a common sense decision based on how you sense the Lord is leading you.

You can know a guided life, you can know the Lords leading. As you seek His direction and control, allowing Him to lead, it will not be long before you experience a deep inner peace.

The more you are in tune with the Holy Spirit the more you will sense His leading in ordinary daily life

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# 12: OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

*James 1:13-14*

*'When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me". For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.'*

## **Question. What is it? What is temptation?**

It has never disappeared and has never had to be reinvented. It has been with us since the time of Adam and Eve.

Every person who has ever lived including you have experienced it. It has been the cause of many of the wrongs in society. The jails are full of people who have succumbed to it.

Some have gone to an early grave because of it.

## **Answer**

God and His people have an enemy called Satan, or the devil. He is a spiritual being who has a host of demonic servants working with him. Their aim is to draw people away from God and get them to serve Satan instead.

You might not have realised it but before you became a Christian you were under his power. But now that you've moved over to God's side you've become a threat to him - and he doesn't like it! So to you he has now become 'the tempter.' (NT) Matthew 4:3. His objective is to try and lure you away from the Lord. He will tempt you to do what you know is wrong, or to fail to do what you know is right.

(NT) James 4:17.

(NT) 1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

## **Understanding Temptation - What it is and what it isn't**

It is important you have a proper understanding of temptation. From the two verses mentioned at the beginning of this paper (N.T) James 1:13-14, there are some very clear statements on this subject.

### **Temptation is Universal**

The first two words of verses 13 say, 'when tempted.' Notice they do not say, 'if tempted.' From this we can conclude that temptation is universal. Everyone will be tempted. Only dead people aren't tempted. Every living person who has ever lived or who is living now will face temptation. It is universal and inevitable.

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## **Temptation is not sin**

It is not a sin to be tempted. Temptation only becomes sinful when you actually do or say something that is sinful. Temptation itself isn't a sin, but if you let your mind dwell on a temptation it will soon lead you into sin!

Even Jesus Himself was tempted, just like we are.

(NT) Heb 4:14-16 So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. 15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. 16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

'You can't stop the birds flying over your head, but you can stop them making a nest in your hair.'

Temptation itself is not sinful, it is yielding to temptation that is sin.

Just like you and me Jesus was tempted in every way. He experienced every temptation possible to man. But unlike you and me, He never yielded to those temptations. Though tempted, He never sinned.

## **Temptation cannot be attributed to God**

(NT) James 1:13-14 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, 'God is tempting me.' God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.

You should never blame God for your sinful behaviour. He is not the one who tempts you nor is He the one who causes you to sin. In fact, because of free will God does not force anyone to do anything they don't want to do. No believer should ever blame God when they are tempted to do evil. Even when God tests you it is never with the intention of enticing you to sin.

## **Temptation is from the devil**

Temptation originates with the devil himself. He is the one who tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God and sin. (OT) Genesis 3:1-19. He is the one who tempted Jesus. (NT) Matthew 4:1-11. He is the one who will tempt you.

(NT) John 8:44 For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Satan or the devil (the two most common names) is described in many different ways. Each one of them portray something of his character. Here are some of the names. He is called, 'the prince of the power of the air, the god of this age, the ruler of darkness, the dragon, the deceiver, Beelzebub (prince of demons), the wicked one, the tempter, the accuser of the brethren, an angel of light, a liar, a murderer, the enemy, a roaring lion.' Satan is the one who tempts you to commit sin and disobey God. He has been doing it 'from the beginning of time' and he will continue to do it until that day when he is finally banished to hell.

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## **Temptation comes in a variety of forms**

It is important that you begin to recognise some of the ways Satan will tempt you. If you can recognise some of the ways he tempts you, that will help you to be better prepared for the battle of overcoming temptation.

(NT) 1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Satan's temptations come in a variety of forms. Being alert will help us to detect them. They will include the following:

### **A direct appeal to your natural appetites**

James calls this your, 'evil desires' in the verse quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

### **Suggestions by another person**

Joseph, for instance, received sexual advances from his master's wife (OT) Genesis 39:6-7. Peter tried to steer Jesus away from the cross. (NT) Matthew 16:21- 23.

### **Success**

If you are successful, Satan may tempt you to become proud. If it's someone else, he may tempt you to become jealous.

(NT) James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

(NT) 1 Peter 5:5 tells us that, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'

### **Difficulties**

Failure, sickness, personal tragedy, opposition or disappointment - all these can tempt you to accuse God of letting you down and jettisoning your Christian faith. This is one the things the devil tried to exploit when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. It was after 40 days of prayer and fasting when Jesus was obviously hungry and physically weak. (NT) Matthew 4:1-3. It's often during times of physical weakness - sickness, tiredness, difficulties etc., that we take our focus off the Lord.

### **Fear of the consequences of following the Lord**

Mockery, discrimination or other persecution can tempt you to forsake your loyalty to Him.

### **Isolation - Loneliness**

Isolating yourself from other Christians is a very real way that Satan will exploit. Satan knows how weak you can become when you are away from the watchful eyes, encouraging words and support of others. This is why the Bible commands us to meet together regularly for Christian fellowship. (NT) Hebrews 10:25. If you need to, look again at chapter 7 where we looked at the importance of church fellowship.

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## **Morals and Money**

Two of the most vulnerable areas in people's life's today are sex and money.

Sex in itself is not sinful as long as it is enjoyed within the loving relationship and life-long commitment of marriage. It is of course, one of the most powerful and emotional desires within men and women and one of the most effective forms of temptation Satan uses in the world today. We are living in a world where sexual sin is accommodated and where society accepts it as the norm. Once again you might want to look again at chapter 9 where we looked at this subject.

Money is another powerful desire that can become a cause of temptation and sin. Please understand that money and wealth is not sinful as long as it is achieved honestly and truthfully and as long as it doesn't become the driving force in your life. Money itself is 'neutral – it's how we use it and how we acquire it that is the key. It can be used for good or bad, it can be obtained legitimately or illegitimately, it can be a blessing or a curse.

(NT) 1 Tim 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

The world around us is full of tempting sights and sounds - books, films, magazines, T.V, people you work with, even family and friends can lead you away from God and into sin.

### **Victory is possible**

You'll never reach a place this side of Christ's return where you cease to be tempted, but you really can be victorious over temptation when it comes.

### **Jesus can help us when we are tempted**

(NT) Heb 4:14-16 So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. 15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. 16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Temptation never defeated Him!

Because Jesus resisted temptation He can help us to do the same.

### **Jesus will always provide a way out**

(NT) 1 Cor 10:13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

When you face temptation you can be absolutely sure that you are not going to face something you cannot bear, you cannot stand up against and you cannot find a way out of.

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## **Jesus lives inside every believer**

(NT) 1 John 4:4-5 But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

Temptation can be resisted by those born of God. Temptation doesn't have to defeat us. God has promised to help you, He has promised that He will never allow the devil to tempt you in such a way that you cannot resist and overcome, and because you have Jesus living within you, you have the ability to know victory.

We have to admit, that when we do give in to temptation, it is not because we have to, but because we decide to.

## **Defending yourself against temptation - How to overcome**

What are some of the things you can do that will help you overcome temptation? Well there are various steps you can take. Some will be preventive and others will be offensive depending on the situation and circumstance of the temptation.

### **Stay on the alert**

While you shouldn't go around cringing lest temptation should strike, don't go to the opposite extreme by becoming cocky and over-confident in yourself. The devil is a great deceiver, with lots of experience. (NT) 1 Corinthians 10:12 says: 'If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.'

### **Avoid temptation**

You need to take sensible steps to avoid temptation. If you have a particular problem in a particular area, it is common sense not to put yourself in vulnerable situations, so avoid those places or people who make it difficult for you to overcome.

If you're having sexual temptations, for example, be practical about avoiding certain videos and/or explicit magazines.

If alcohol is a problem, keep away from pubs or bars. It's clearly unwise to go socialising in a pub if you have a drink problem.

Other things you need to avoid are anything to do with the occult, including horoscopes, fortune-tellers, Ouija boards, witchcraft and spiritism. This is Satan's territory. To step over the line is to court disaster.

Whatever area of weakness it might be, make sure you avoid those places and situations which can tempt you to indulge in a particular sinful activity. So if it's something you're watching, switch it off, if it's something you're reading, throw it out, if it's somewhere you're going, don't go!

### **Run for your life**

Some temptations call for you to remove yourself rapidly from the situation. This is exactly what Joseph did when confronted by the wife of Potiphar. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and made a grab at him, he ran from the scene of temptation, leaving her holding his coat (OT) Genesis 39:11-12.



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To have stayed and discussed the situation would have been fatal.

(NT) 1 Cor 10:14-15 So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.

If you're offered drugs in a night club, get out. And ask yourself why on earth you were in such a place to begin with. (NT) Ephesians 4:27 says, 'do not give the devil a foothold.'

Running from certain situations and avoiding situations is not a sign of weakness but is a sign of strength. They show your utter determination to stay right away from anything that may cause you to stumble in your walk with the Lord.

### **Stand firm and fight**

Although in some cases we need to run away from certain situations, in most temptations you must stand up to the devil undaunted, then he's the one who'll do the running.

(N.T) 1 Peter 5:9 says that we are to, 'Resist him, standing firm in the faith.'

Another very important verse is (NT) James 4:7. This is what it says: Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

This is not something you do in your own strength. Notice how, in this verse, before the command to resist the devil, there's a command to 'submit yourself to God.'

By submitting to God, God Himself fights for you and the devil's defeat is assured.

### **Use your Bible**

You can read in (NT) Mathew 4:1-11 how Jesus when facing a serious period of heavy temptation quoted Scripture to defeat the devil's temptations. You can do the same.

(OT) Ps 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

The Bible (The Word of God) is a weapon given to you to help you resist temptation. It's often described as a sword (NT) Ephesians 6:17 & Hebrews 4:12.

You need to spend time reading and thinking about the Bible and its teaching. A knowledge of God's map and the following of its directions will keep us on the right road. It will help us avoid the wrong turnings and pitfalls. The 'light' will keep us from, stumbling in the dark. The Word of God has an answer to every attack of Satan. God's Word will unlock the door of victory. Let's make full use of this marvelous weapon.

### **Keep Close to God**

Prayer had much to do with Jesus' life of victory.

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(NT) Mark 1:32-37 That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. 33 The whole town gathered at the door to watch. 34 So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak. 35 Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. 36 Later Simon and the others went out to find him. 37 When they found him, they said, 'Everyone is looking for you.'

In (NT) Matthew 26:41 Jesus told the disciples to 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.'

If we are to resist the devil and overcome temptation we need to live close to the Father, and prayer is central to this. Our Lord's example needs to be followed by you and me. Would we not be better prepared in times of temptation if we were facing it from the vantage point of fresh ongoing times of fellowship with the Father? Spending time alone with God, worshiping Him, praising Him. Loving Him, drawing close to Him, getting to know Him better, prepares us and gives us a greater ability and strength to triumph during times of temptation.

### **What to do if you sin**

In spite of all your efforts to overcome temptation, you may slip up from, time to time. A true Christian doesn't make a deliberate habit of sinning, but all of us sin at some time or other. It doesn't mean we're no longer Christians, but it does mean that our friendship with Jesus is affected and we need to do something about it. So, what should we do? John gave the answer in (NT) 1 John 1:9.

(NT) 1 John 1:9-10 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

- Don't claim that you haven't slipped up. He knows you have, even if other people don't.
- Confess your sin openly, asking God to forgive you and clean you up for Jesus' sake.
- Believe the statement that, 'he will forgive' you. He never refuses. He promises to purify you from all the unrighteousness you've committed.
- Go on your way rejoicing, confident in the Lord's presence with you.
- Determine to learn from the experience and so become increasing; victorious over sin.

***Now arrange with your befriender to go through the 'New Family Course' to carry on your journey of learning and growing in your faith.***