

# **FIRST LIGHT**

**YOUR NEW JOURNEY WALKING WITH JESUS**

**NO PRESSURE. JUST GRACE.**

**KIA BROWN**

FIRST LIGHT: YOUR NEW JOURNEY WITH JESUS

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## Chapter 1: Beginning Your Journey: Meeting Jesus for the First Time

Welcome to the first steps of your spiritual journey - a story where *you* are the main character. This chapter is like the opening scene of an epic adventure, one where every step forward brings discovery, growth, and a deeper connection with Jesus. You might be asking, “What does it *actually* mean to follow Him?” or “Where do I even begin?” Those questions aren’t just normal, they’re sacred. They’re proof that your heart is stirring, ready to explore the transformative love Jesus offers. Think of this journey like setting sail into uncharted waters. The horizon is vast, the waves may rise, but the destination is worth every moment. Ready to cast off? Let’s dive in.

Let’s start with Jesus Himself. For centuries, He’s been a magnet for the curious, the broken, and the hopeful. But who *is* He? The Bible introduces Him as God’s Son, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), who stepped into our world not to condemn it but to rescue it (John 3:17). Imagine a lighthouse cutting through a storm—that’s Jesus. He’s the light no darkness can extinguish (John 8:12), calling us to live boldly in love, forgiveness, and purpose. When you picture Him, what do you feel? A warmth? A nudge? A quiet reassurance? That’s His Spirit drawing you near (John 6:44). This moment - your openness to Him - is where everything begins.

Meeting Jesus starts with an introduction, much like getting to know a new friend. You’d share your story, ask questions, and listen. With Jesus, that introduction often happens through the Bible. Yes, it’s a thick book with ancient stories, but it’s also a living love letter (Hebrews 4:12). Take the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—where His life unfolds page by page. Read how He stopped for an outcast woman at a well, offering her living water (John 4:1-26). Or how He healed a paralyzed man, not just physically but spiritually, saying, “Your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:1-12). These stories aren’t just history—they’re invitations. When Jesus tells the Good Samaritan to love without limits (Luke 10:25-37), He’s asking *you*, “How will *you* show mercy today?”

So, how do you build a relationship with Him? Start by talking. Prayer isn’t about perfect words; it’s about honesty. Jesus already knows your heart (Psalm 139:1-4), so you can say, “I’m confused, but I’m here,” or “Help me trust You.” Picture Him sitting across from you, fully present, like a friend who never checks the clock. The Bible urges, “Pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8). Maybe start your day with, “Jesus, walk with me today,” or end it with, “What should I learn from this?” Over time, these conversations become the rhythm of your life.

But relationships take investment. Think of your closest friendship—it didn’t bloom in a day. It took shared moments, vulnerability, and time. With Jesus, it’s the same. Carve out quiet moments to pray, even if it’s five minutes on your commute. Open the Bible and read a verse or two, asking, “What’s this saying about *You*, God?” Journal your thoughts, doubts, or prayers. Like a seed, faith grows when nurtured (Matthew 13:31-32). Don’t rush the process—He’s patient with your pace (2 Peter 3:9).

Here's a game-changer: *community*. Faith isn't a solo hike; it's a group expedition. The early Christians "devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, and prayer" (Acts 2:42), and we're called to do the same. Find a church or small group where you can ask questions, celebrate wins, and pray through struggles. Ever had a friend cheer you on during a tough day? Multiply that by a room full of people who've felt lost too yet found hope in Jesus. As Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one... if either falls, one can help the other up."

Now, let's get real—this journey isn't all sunsets and smooth trails. Doubt might creep in. You'll wrestle with questions like, "Is God really listening?" or "Why do I still feel stuck?" Even the disciple Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection until he touched His scars (John 20:24-29). Jesus didn't scold him; He met him right there in his uncertainty. Your doubts don't scare God. In fact, He says, "Come let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). Think of a toddler learning to walk; they stumble, but their parents' arms are always outstretched. Jesus promises the same: "I will never leave you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Finally, get ready for transformation. Following Jesus isn't about rule-following; it's about heart-changing. Little by little, you'll notice old habits losing their grip, compassion replacing judgment, or peace steadying your anxiety. It's the "new creation" promise (2 Corinthians 5:17) coming alive in you. Maybe you'll start seeing people through His eyes - the lonely coworker, the grumpy neighbor - and feel nudged to love them boldly. That's Jesus working in you (Philippians 2:13), shaping you into the person He designed you to be.

As we close this chapter, pause and reflect. What's one step you can take today? Maybe it's reading Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) or whispering a prayer for the first time. Whatever it is, know this: Jesus isn't keeping score. He's saying, "Come as you are. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Your journey has already begun - and every step, even the wobbly ones, matters to Him.

Welcome to the adventure of a lifetime. May your heart stay open, your courage grows, and your story become a testament to His unshakable love. Onward, friend! 🌟

## Chapter 2: Building a Foundation: The Basics of Faith

Welcome to the next phase of your adventure with Jesus! If Chapter 1 was about meeting Him for the first time, this chapter is about rolling up your sleeves and laying the groundwork for a relationship that lasts. Think of faith like building a treehouse as a kid, you need solid materials, a little guidance, and the willingness to climb even when the view from the ground feels safer. Ready to hammer in the first nail? Let's get started.

First, let's redefine *faith*. It's not just agreeing with a list of beliefs; it's leaning into trust when life feels shaky. Hebrews 11:1 calls faith "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Imagine teaching a child to ride a bike—you promise, "I won't let go," even as they wobble. That's how Jesus invites us to trust Him. When bills pile up or relationships fray, faith whispers, "God's got this" (Proverbs 3:5-6). What area of your life feels uncertain right now? Picture Jesus standing beside you, His hand steady on your shoulder, saying, "Let's navigate this together."

Now, let's talk about *grace*—the scandalous, no-strings-attached love of God. Romans 5:8 says, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Grace isn't a reward for good behavior; it's a gift wrapped in mercy. Think of the thief on the cross, who'd lived a life of crime yet heard Jesus say, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Grace meets us in our mess and says, "You're loved anyway." Ever felt like you had to earn God's approval? Grace dismantles that lie. Your worth isn't based on your performance but on Jesus' perfection. How might your life change if you truly believed that?

Next up: *prayer*. It's your direct line to God, no voicemail needed. Jesus modeled this in the Garden of Gethsemane, pouring out His fears yet surrendering to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39). Prayer isn't about polished words; it's raw honesty. Philippians 4:6-7 urges, "Present your requests to God... and His peace will guard your heart." Imagine texting a friend at 2 a.m. because you're overwhelmed—that's prayer. Try starting with, "Jesus, I'm exhausted," or "Thank You for that unexpected joy today." Over time, these conversations will become as natural as breathing.

Then there's the *Bible*—God's love letter and instruction manual rolled into one. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet," lighting up next steps when the path feels dark. Start with the Gospels to see Jesus' compassion in action: healing the sick, dining with outsiders, and calming storms. When you read the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), notice how Jesus defends her before transforming her. The Bible isn't just ancient text; it's alive, "sharper than any double-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). What's one verse that's stuck with you? Write it down, stick it on your mirror, and let it shape your day.

Here's a truth we often overlook *community* isn't optional. Faith thrives in the soil of relationships. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" and not to "give up meeting together." Think of the early church in Acts 2:44-47; they shared meals, resources, and stories of God's goodness. Your community might be a small group, a friend who prays with you, or a grandma who sends Scripture texts. Ever had someone hug you

and say, “I’ve been there too”? That’s the Body of Christ in action. Who can you reach out to this week to say, “Let’s grow together”?

As you build this foundation, remember faith is a *journey*, not a sprint. There will be days you feel unstoppable and days you want to hide under the covers. Even Peter, who walked on water, began to sink when he took his eyes off Jesus (Matthew 14:30). But here’s the beauty—Jesus didn’t scold him; He grabbed his hand. Your doubts and stumbles don’t disqualify you. They’re opportunities to experience God’s faithfulness anew. What’s one struggle you need to hand over to Him today?

Finally, let’s talk about *action*. James 2:26 says, “Faith without deeds is dead.” Faith isn’t just about what you believe; it’s about how you live. When you tip a struggling waiter extra, forgive a grumpy coworker, or volunteer at a food pantry, you’re putting flesh on your faith. Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:20). What’s one small way you can reflect His love this week? Maybe it’s a kind word, a listening ear, or a withheld judgment. Little acts of obedience build a life of impact.

As we wrap up, take a deep breath. Building a foundation isn’t about perfection - it’s about persistence. Jesus promised, “Everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). Storms will come, but your faith will stand firm because it’s rooted in Him.

So, what’s your next step? Maybe it’s opening the Bible for five minutes each morning, joining a small group, or simply praying, “Jesus, strengthen my trust in You.” Whatever it is, know this: every brick you lay matters. You’re not just building a foundation - you’re building a life.

Onward, builder! 🛠️

## Chapter 3: Prayer: Your Conversation with God

Welcome to the heartbeat of your faith journey - prayer. If the earlier chapters were about meeting Jesus and laying a foundation, this chapter is where you learn to *talk* to Him. Not reciting scripts or checking a religious box, but diving into raw, real, life-giving conversation. Picture prayer like sitting across from your closest friend at a cozy coffee shop, steaming mug in hand, sharing your deepest fears and wildest joys. No masks, no pretense - just *you* and God. Ready to discover how prayer can transform not just your spiritual life, but your entire perspective? Let's lean in.

### What Is Prayer? More Than Words

Prayer is communication, yes—but it's also communion. It's the thread that stitches your heart to God's. Jesus modeled this when He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-13). Notice He didn't say, "Our King" or "Our Judge" first. He called God' Father, intimate and relational. Prayer is your invitation to crawl into the lap of a Parent who adores you (Romans 8:15). It's not about eloquence; it's about honesty. Think of the tax collector in Jesus' parable who prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). That raw, two-sentence cry? Jesus called it *true prayer*. What would it look like for you to pray that openly?

### Why Prayer Matters: Oxygen for Your Soul

Ever tried holding your breath underwater? Without prayer, faith suffocates. Paul urges, "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) - not because God needs your words, but because *you* need His presence. Prayer is how you "cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Remember Elijah? After calling down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36–39), he collapsed in exhaustion and prayed, "Take my life" (1 Kings 19:4). God didn't scold him; He sent an angel with food and whispered, "Rest, then keep going" (1 Kings 19:5–8). Prayer isn't about performance; it's survival. When's the last time you let yourself *fall apart* in God's presence?

### Biblical Blueprints: Prayer in Action

The Bible is packed with prayer warriors—ordinary people who clung to God in chaos. Take **Hannah** (1 Samuel 1:10-20), whose tears soaked the temple floor as she begged for a child. Her prayer wasn't pretty, but it was powerful. Or **Hezekiah**, who spread a threatening letter before God and prayed, "Save us!" (2 Kings 19:14-19). God answered by annihilating an army overnight. Then there's **Jesus Himself**, who rose before dawn to pray (Mark 1:35) and wept in Gethsemane, "Take this cup from Me—*yet not My will*" (Luke 22:42). These stories show prayer isn't about getting what you want; it's about aligning with God's heart. What's *your* Gethsemane—the thing you're pleading with God to change?

### How to Pray: No Rules, Just Relationship

1. **Start Simple:** Jesus' disciples begged, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). His answer? The Lord's Prayer is a framework, not a formula. Begin with gratitude: "Thank You for this coffee, for the sun, for breath in my lungs." Then ask: "Help me love my coworker today," or "Heal my friend's anxiety."

2. **Get Real:** God already knows your secrets (Psalm 139:1-4), so why hide? The Psalms are full of rage, doubt, and despair - like David's raw cry, "How long, Lord? Will You forget me forever?" (Psalm 13:1). Try journaling your prayers: "God, I'm furious at..." or "I don't believe You're listening." He can handle it.
3. **Pray Scripture:** When words fail, borrow God's. Stressed? Pray Philippians 4:6-7. Fearful? Claim Isaiah 41:10. Jesus used Deuteronomy to combat Satan's lies (Matthew 4:1-11) - so can you.

### **When Prayer Feels Hard: Wrestling with Distraction**

Let's get real: Prayer isn't always serene. Sometimes your mind races like a toddler on sugar. The disciples fell asleep while Jesus prayed (Matthew 26:40) - you're in good company! Here's the fix: *Embrace the mess*. Set a timer for five minutes. Light a candle. Whisper, "Holy Spirit, help me focus" (Romans 8:26). When distractions hit, picture handing them to Jesus like sticky notes: "Worried about the bills, *You take this, Lord.*" Rinse, repeat.

### **Listening: The Forgotten Half of Prayer**

Prayer isn't a monologue; it's a dialogue. After pouring out your heart, *pause*. Habakkuk said, "I will stand at my watch... to see what He will say to me" (Habakkuk 2:1). Elijah heard God not in the earthquake or fire, but in a "gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12). Try this: Sit in silence for two minutes post-prayer. Ask, "God, what do *You* want to say to me?" Maybe a verse pops into your head, or a sudden sense of peace. That's His voice.

### **Praying Together: When Faith Becomes Family**

Jesus promised, "Where two or three gather in My name, there I am with them" (Matthew 18:20). The early church prayed relentlessly together (Acts 4:24-31), and God shook the room, literally. Find a prayer partner, join a small group, or FaceTime a friend to pray over a crisis. Ever prayed aloud with someone? It's like striking a match in a dark cave—suddenly, you're both illuminated.

### **Your Prayer Journey: Growth, Not Perfection**

Prayer is a dance, not a drill. Some days you'll tango with passion; other days, you'll trip over your feet. The point is to keep showing up. Think of the persistent widow who bugged the judge until he gave her justice (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus didn't applaud her eloquence—He praised her grit. So, pray when it's dry. Pray when it's desperate. Pray when you'd rather binge Netflix. As you do, you'll find prayer isn't just something you *do*—it's who you *become*: a person utterly dependent on God.

### **Your Next Step: Let's Pray Right Now**

Don't overthink it. Close your eyes and try this:

- **Adoration:** "God, You're the Maker of the stars—yet You know my name. Wow."
- **Confession:** "I messed up yesterday when I \_\_\_\_\_. Forgive me."
- **Thanksgiving:** "Thank You for \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Supplication:** "Please help me with \_\_\_\_\_."



Then wait. Listen. Let Him love you.

Remember, prayer isn't about changing God's mind - it's about letting Him change *yours*. As you practice, you'll discover what Augustine did: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." So, breathe deep, friend. Your conversation with God is just beginning—and it's the adventure of a lifetime. 💬 ✨

## Chapter 4: Finding Community: The Power of Fellowship

Welcome to the chapter where your faith journey goes from “me” to “we.” If the earlier chapters were about building your foundation with Jesus, this one is about discovering the family you didn’t know you had. Ever felt like a lone puzzle piece, unsure where you fit? That’s how many of us start—until we realize faith isn’t meant to be a solo expedition. Jesus didn’t walk this earth in isolation; He surrounded Himself with disciples, healed crowds, and even wept with friends (John 11:35). Your spiritual journey thrives in the soil of *community*. Let’s unpack why fellowship isn’t just nice, it’s necessary.

### Why Fellowship? Because Even Jesus Had a Squad

God wired us for connection. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one...if either falls, one can help the other up.” Think of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 - they shared meals, prayed together, and sold possessions to meet each other’s needs. Their bond was so magnetic that “the Lord added to their number daily.” Fellowship isn’t just coffee and small talk; it’s lifeblood. When my friend battled depression, it was her small group that showed up with casseroles, tears, and Psalm 34:18 reminders: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.” *That’s* fellowship. Who’s your “tribe” when life unravels?

### Church: More Than a Building—It’s a Body

Yes, church can feel intimidating. The stained glass, the hymns, the stranger who shakes your hand a little too eagerly. But strip away the formality, and the church is simply God’s people gathered. Paul calls believers the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27) - each person a vital limb. The chatterbox teen? She’s the mouth sharing hope. The quiet guy stacking chairs? He’s the one serving unseen. Your local church is a living, breathing family where you *belong*, even if you’re still figuring out what you believe. When I first visited mine, I sat in the back, arms crossed. But when a widow patted my shoulder and said, “We’re glad you’re here,” I felt Jesus’ embrace through her. What’s one fear holding you back from walking through those doors?

### Small Groups: Where Masks Come Off

Jesus’ tight-knit crew of twelve didn’t just listen to sermons—they fished together, argued over who was greatest (Luke 22:24), and huddled in a boat during storms. Small groups are where faith gets real. Imagine a living room where you can admit, “I yelled at my kids today,” or “I’m doubting God’s plan,” without getting side-eye. James 5:16 urges us to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” My group once spent an hour praying for a couple struggling to conceive. Months later, when they announced their pregnancy, we cried like it was *our* miracle. Vulnerability breeds miracles. Ready to risk being known?

### Serving Together: Love in Work Boots

Nothing bonds people faster than rolling up their sleeves. Jesus washed feet (John 13:1-17), fed thousands (Matthew 14:13-21), and told us, “Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Serving isn’t about earning salvation—it’s about embodying it. My friend joined a prison ministry team and met a man who’d never heard “God loves you.” As they

studied Philippians together, both their lives changed. When you pass out sandwiches at a shelter or paint a neighbor's fence, you're not just helping others, you're stitching your heart to theirs. Ever noticed how laughter flows more easily when you're sweating side by side?

### **Building Community: It's a Garden, not a Drive-Thru**

Real fellowship takes work. Like a garden, it needs watering, weeding, and patience. Paul urges, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). Translation: People will annoy you. They'll forget your name, disagree on politics, or bring store-bought cookies to the potluck (the horror!). But grace says, "I'll choose to see Jesus in you anyway." When a friend ghosted my texts, I wrestled with resentment—until I remembered Peter denied Jesus *three times*, yet He restored him (John 21:15-19). We're all works in progress. What relationship needs your grace today?

### **Diversity: God's Palette of Stories**

God's family isn't a cookie-cutter suburb—it's a kaleidoscope. Revelation 7:9 paints heaven as a crowd "from every nation, tribe, people, and language." My small group includes a recovering addict, a CEO, and a single mom on food stamps. Their stories have wrecked and rebuilt my faith. The Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42) was an outcast, yet Jesus made her the first evangelist. When we cling to people like us, we miss God's creativity. Ever shared a meal with someone whose life looks nothing like yours? That's where faith stretches.

### **When Community Gets Messy: Conflict & Grace**

Let's be honest: *People* are the hardest part of community. Even Paul and Barnabas split over a disagreement (Acts 15:36-41). But Jesus never promised harmony—He promised His presence (Matthew 18:20). When my Bible study split over a heated debate, we had to choose: Dig trenches or extend olive branches? We landed on Philippians 2:3: "Value others above yourselves." It wasn't easy but repairing that rift taught us more about Jesus than any sermon. Got a conflict brewing? Pray, "God, show me *my* part," before pointing fingers.

### **Your Next Step: From Spectator to Participant**

Community isn't a menu to browse—it's a table to join. Start small:

- **Visit a Church:** Sneak in late, sit in the back, and stay for cookies.
- **Join a Group:** Google "[Your City] + small group" or ask your barista if they know any.
- **Serve Once:** Soup kitchen, nursery volunteering, or writing encouragement cards.

Jesus' final command was to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19)—not alone, but together. You'll fumble, forget names, and maybe eat a dry casserole or two. But with every awkward handshake, you're building God's kingdom.

So, who's waiting for *you* to show up? Your people aren't perfect—but they're yours. And together, you'll reflect Jesus in ways you never could alone. Onward, family. ❤️

## **Chapter 5: Living Your Faith: Practical Steps to Follow**

Welcome to the chapter where your faith stops being a Sunday accessory and becomes your everyday oxygen. If the earlier chapters were about meeting Jesus, building foundations, praying, and finding community, this one is about rolling up your sleeves and *living* like you mean it. Let's get real: Faith isn't a decorative pillow for your soul—it's a muscle. And like any muscle, it needs daily exercise. Ever tried a new workout? At first, it's awkward. You stumble, sweat, and question your life choices. But with consistency, strength comes. Living your faith works the same way. Ready to flex? Let's move.

### **Prayer: Your Morning Coffee with God**

Prayer isn't a monologue; it's a rhythm. Jesus modeled this by slipping away to lonely places to pray (Luke 5:16), even when crowds demanded His attention. Start your day like you're texting a friend: "Good morning, God. Help me not lose my temper in traffic today." Or, "Thank You for the snooze button and this new chance." Paul says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) - not because God needs your words, but because *you* need His presence. When my toddler throws a cereal tantrum, I whisper, "Jesus, give me patience *now*." It's not elegant, but it's real. What's your "car cry" or "shower vent" prayer? God's listening, even to the messy ones.

### **Bible Reading: Soul Food for Hungry Hearts**

The Bible isn't a dusty rulebook—it's God's voice on paper. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy to fight temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), and Psalm 22 as He hung on the cross (Matthew 27:46). Start small. Read one Proverb a day (there are 31 - match the date!). Or dive into Mark's Gospel, the action-packed cliff notes of Jesus' life. When I'm overwhelmed, I camp in Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd..." (v.1). It's like a mental spa day. Journal your questions: "Why does God let bad things happen?" or "How do I love my nosy neighbor?" The Psalms are full of raw cries—permission granted to bring your doubts to the page.

### **Community: Your Faith Gym Buddy**

Faith without fellowship is like a lone ember - it dies out. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Don't give up meeting together," and for good reason. My small group once carried me through a panic attack via Zoom prayers at midnight. Find your tribe: Join a church serving team, a book study, or a hiking group that prays on mountaintops. The early church "ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46). Translation: They did life messy and loud. Hate small talk? Me too. Try this icebreaker: "What's one thing you're trusting God for right now?" Watch walls crumble.

### **Serving: Love With Its Sleeves Rolled Up**

Jesus didn't just preach love—He *was* love in work boots. He washed feet (John 13:1-17), fed thousands (Matthew 14:13-21), and told us, "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Serving isn't about earning points; it's about reflecting Jesus' heart. My friend tutors refugees, and she says their laughter heals her cynicism. Start local: Babysit for a single mom. Take cookies to the grumpy neighbor. Pay for the coffee behind you. When you serve, you're not just helping others, you're rewiring your own heart to beat like His.

## **Forgiveness: Dropping the Rocks We Carry**

Let's be honest - forgiveness sucks. It feels like letting someone off the hook. But Jesus, hanging on the cross, gasped, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). He didn't wait for apologies. Why? Because unforgiveness is a poison we drink, hoping the other person dies. The Lord's Prayer is brutal: "Forgive us as we forgive others" (Matthew 6:12). Ouch. I once held a grudge for a decade - it shriveled my joy. When I finally wrote the letter (and burned it), I felt lighter. Who's your "I'll never forgive..." person? Pray, "God, help me *want* to forgive." He'll handle the rest.

## **Growth: Embracing the Stretch Marks**

Faith isn't a straight line—it's a spiral. You'll circle back to lessons you thought you'd mastered. Peter walked on water, then sank (Matthew 14:29-31); denied Jesus, then became a church pillar. Growth means giving yourself grace. Journal your milestones: "Today, I didn't gossip!" or "I apologized first!" Celebrate the baby steps. Paul says, "Press on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:14). When I fail, I picture Jesus fist-bumping my effort, not facepalming my flops.

## **Your Next Step: The 24-Hour Faith Challenge**

Ready to put this into play? Try today:

1. **Prayer Pulse:** Set three phone alarms labeled "Breathe & Pray." At each pause and say one sentence to God.
2. **Scripture Snack:** Read Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes). Underline a line that stings or soothes.
3. **Serve Sneak Attack:** Buy a gift card for someone stressed. Anonymously. Feel like a grace ninja.
4. **Forgiveness Flash:** Text someone: "No reply needed - just wanted you to know I'm praying for you." Watch bitterness crack.

Jesus didn't say, "Follow Me when you're perfect." He said, "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19). Period. Living your faith isn't about nailing it, it's about showing up, sweaty and sincere, every single day. So, lace up your shoes, friend. The road is long, but the view? So worth it. 🚶‍♀️ 💜 ✨

## **Chapter 6: Growing Deeper: Continuing Your Spiritual Journey**

Welcome to the chapter where your faith stops being a seedling and starts stretching its roots into unshakable ground. If the earlier parts of your journey were about taking first steps, this is where you lace up your hiking boots and venture into the wild, beautiful terrain of a life fully surrendered to Jesus. Growth isn't a checkbox—it's a daily choice to dig deeper, even when the soil feels rocky. Ready to go beyond the shoreline? Let's dive into the depths.

### **Prayer: From Chitchat to Soul Conversations**

Prayer is the oxygen of your faith, but let's be honest—sometimes it feels like talking to a wall. Jesus gets it. In Gethsemane, He begged His disciples, "Stay here and keep watch with Me" (Matthew 26:38), only to find them snoring. Yet He kept praying. Consistency isn't about perfect focus; it's about showing up. Start with a "breath prayer": Inhale, "Jesus," exhale, "I need You." Rinse, repeat. The psalmist wrote, "Evening, morning, and noon I cry out... and He hears my voice" (Psalm 55:17). Try setting alarms labeled "God Time" or scribbling prayers on sticky notes. My friend taped one to her mirror: "God, today's a mess. Help me see You in it." Over time, these fragments weave a lifeline. What's your *real*est prayer today?

### **Bible Immersion: Feasting on the Bread of Life**

The Bible isn't a snack—it's a feast. Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). But how do you digest a book with 66 chapters of history, poetry, and prophecy? Start with the Gospels. Watch Jesus flip tables in the temple (John 2:13-17) and hug people with leprosy (Mark 1:40-42). Notice His humanity and divinity colliding. Then try "lectio divina," an ancient practice: Read a verse slowly, chew on a phrase, pray it back. When I read "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10), I picture God cupping my frantic face and whispering, "Breathe." What verse feels like a warm blanket for your soul? Write it on your fridge, your lock screen—anywhere it can ambush you with truth.

### **Community: Your Faith Greenhouse**

You can't grow alone. Even Elijah, the fiery prophet, crumbled into depression until God gave him Elisha (1 Kings 19:1-18). Your squad matters. The early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer" (Acts 2:42). Find your people: Join a Bible study where it's safe to say, "I don't get this," or a serving team that laughs while packing meal kits. My small group, once ugly-cried through a divorce story, then circled up to pray. Vulnerability fertilizes growth. If community feels intimidating, start with one person. Text them, "Can we grab coffee? I need to process something." Watch God multiply courage.

### **Serving: Love in Steel-Toed Boots**

Faith without works isn't just dead—it's *boring* (James 2:17). Jesus didn't just preach love; He bled it. When He washed feet (John 13:1-17), He showed that serving isn't beneath anyone. My neighbor mows lawns for single moms—not for applause, but because "Jesus would've done it." Start small: Pay for a stranger's coffee. Babysit for an exhausted parent. Serve at a shelter and listen to stories. When you do, you're not just helping others, you're sanding off your own rough edges. Paul says, "Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). What burden can you lift this week?

## Navigating Valleys: When Faith Feels Like Fog

Doubts don't make you a fraud—they make you human. John the Baptist, who'd baptized *Jesus*, later asked from prison, "Are You the one, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3). Even giants of faith wobble. When my dad died, I rage-prayed, "Where *were* You?" God didn't strike me down; He sent friends who sat in silence and casseroles. Psalm 34:18 promises, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted." If you're in a valley, name it: "God, I'm angry/scared/lost." Then open your Bible to the Psalms and let David's raw cries (Psalm 13:1-2) validate yours. Healing starts when honesty meets grace.

## Lifelong Learning: Staying Curious, Staying Hungry



Faith isn't a diploma—it's a never-ending seminar. Proverbs 1:5 says, "Let the wise listen and add to their learning." Read books that stretch you. Listen to podcasts on your commute. Join a bible study. Take a theology class. Ask your pastor the question you're scared to voice. I once googled, "Why does God allow suffering?" and fell down a rabbit hole of Myles Munroe, Charles Stanley, and weeping. It didn't fix my pain, but it deepened my trust. Growth happens when curiosity outpaces complacency.

## Your Next Step: The Roots Challenge

Ready to go deeper? Pick one practice this week:

1. **Prayer Dare:** Confess a secret fear to God. Then text a friend: "Praying for you today."
2. **Bible Deep Dive:** Study John 15:1-8 (the Vine and Branches). Ask, "What needs pruning in my life?"
3. **Serve Incognito:** Leave a gift card on a windshield or send an anonymous note: "You're loved."
4. **Community Leap:** Invite someone over for pizza and ask, "How's your heart *really*?"

Jesus said, "I am the Vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me, you'll bear much fruit" (John 15:5). Notice He didn't say "*perfect* fruit." Your job isn't to hustle for growth, it's to stay connected to Him. So, sink your roots into His Word, His people, and His love. The rest? He'll handle.

Onward, deep diver. The ocean of His grace has no floor.  

## Chapter 7: When Doubt Creeps In

Welcome to the chapter where your faith gets real. If the earlier chapters were about building, growing, and thriving, this one's about the storms that test the foundation. Doubt isn't a detour—it's part of the itinerary. Picture this: You're hiking a mountain trail, and suddenly fog rolls in. The path vanishes. Your heartbeat quickens. *Did I take a wrong turn? Is the summit even there?* That's doubt. But here's the secret: Fog doesn't mean the mountain disappeared. It means you need to slow down, hold the railing, and trust the trailblazer who carved the path. Ready to walk through the mist? Let's go.

### Doubt Is Human - Even Heroes Wrestled

Doubt isn't failure; it's faith in the furnace. Think of **John the Baptist** - the guy who *baptized Jesus*—yet in prison, he sent messengers to ask, “Are You the one, or should we look for another?” (Luke 7:19). Or **Peter**, who walked on water... until he noticed the waves (Matthew 14:30–31). Even **Jesus**, in Gethsemane, prayed, “Take this cup from Me” (Mark 14:36), grappling with His mission. If these giants wobbled, why do we shame ourselves for shivering? God isn't intimidated by your questions. He's saying, “Bring them here. Let's wrestle *together*” (Genesis 32:24-28).

### The Anatomy of Doubt: Why It Stings

Doubt often sprouts from pain. Maybe you prayed for healing, but the diagnosis didn't budge. Or you begged for reconciliation, but the relationship crumbled. *Where was God?* Habakkuk screamed, “How long, Lord, must I call for help, but You do not listen?” (Habakkuk 1:2). David howled, “My God, why have You forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). Jesus quoted that same cry on the cross (Matthew 27:46). Doubt isn't a lack of faith—it's the crack where His light seeps in. Last year, I sat at a friend's graveside, screaming inside, *how could You allow this?* Months later, I found her journal where she'd scribbled, “God's goodness isn't defined by my circumstances.” Her words became my anchor. What pain is fueling your questions?

### Scripture: Your Doubt-Fighting Playbook

When doubt shouts, Scripture whispers. Build a “faith arsenal”:

- **When God feels distant:** “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).
- **When life unravels:** “All things work together for good” (Romans 8:28).
- **When you feel unworthy:** “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

A friend battling anxiety wrote these verses on her bathroom mirror. “Some days, I don't believe them,” she admitted. “But I let God's words argue with my fears.” Try the Psalm 42:5 method: Talk to your soul. “Why so downcast? *Remember* His faithfulness.” Doubt shrinks when truth roars.

### Community: Doubt's Kryptonite

Isolation is doubt's playground. The enemy whispers, “You're the only one struggling.” Lies. After my divorce, I hid in shame until a friend texted, “I'm sitting outside. Let's eat ice cream and



cry.” That night, she shared how she’d doubted God’s love after her miscarriage. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, “Woe to the one who falls and has no one to help them up.” Find your tribe:

- **Small groups:** Where masks crack and tears fall.
- **Mentors:** Older believers who’ve survived their own storms.
- **Accountability partners:** Someone who’ll ask, “How’s your heart *really*?”

When Thomas doubted, Jesus didn’t scold—He showed up (John 20:27). Sometimes, Jesus’ answer to doubt is another person’s face.

### **Doubt as a Catalyst: From Why to Who**

Doubt can be divine sandpaper, smoothing rough faith into trust. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Faith is the art of holding onto things your reason has once accepted, despite your changing moods.” When I doubted God’s goodness, a pastor challenged me: “Don’t just ask *why*. Ask *who*, who is God in this?” Job lost everything but declared, “I know my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25). His doubt didn’t dissolve - it deepened into awe. What if your questions aren’t roadblocks but signposts pointing you to Jesus?

### **The Gift of Lament: Praying Through Doubt**

God can handle your anger. The Bible is full of *lament*—raw, messy prayers. Jeremiah moaned, “You deceived me, Lord!” (Jeremiah 20:7). Jesus wept (John 11:35). Try this: Write an unfiltered letter to God. “I’m furious about \_\_\_\_\_. Help me with my unbelief because I don’t understand \_\_\_\_\_.” Then read Psalm 13: “How long, Lord? Will You forget me forever?” (v.1). Notice how David pivots: “*But* I trust in Your unfailing love” (v.5). Honesty + surrender = breakthrough.

### **Patience: Letting Faith Simmer**

Growth takes time. Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac. Joseph languished in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. Jesus spent 30 years in obscurity before His ministry. Doubt often screams, *Fix this now!* But faith whispers, “Wait for the Lord; be strong” (Psalm 27:14). My cousin prayed for her prodigal son for a decade. “Some days, I doubted God even heard,” she said. Last month, he texted, “Mom, I’m ready to come home.” The wait wasn’t wasted—it was weaving a testimony.

### **Your Doubt Toolkit: Next Steps**

1. **Pray Brutally Honest:** “God, I don’t feel You. Help me *want* to trust You.”
2. **Scripture Bombardment:** Post 3 verses where God proved faithful. Read them aloud.
3. **Doubt Buddy:** Confide in one person this week. “I’m struggling with \_\_\_\_\_.”
4. **Apologetics Dive:** Read *Mere Christianity* or *The Case for Christ*. Let truth fortify you.
5. **Serve Anyway:** Volunteer even when you’re doubting. Action often reignites belief.

### **Conclusion: Doubt’s Surprising Gift**

Doubt isn’t the enemy; it’s the tutor. Every question, every tear, every “Why?” is a thread in the tapestry of your faith. Jesus didn’t rebuke Thomas’s doubt; He invited him to touch His scars (John 20:27). Your doubts are invitations to dig deeper, to touch the wounds of Christ and

whisper, “My Lord and my God!” (v.28). The fog will lift. The mountain stays. And you? You’ll emerge with a faith that’s been tested, refined, and unshakable.

So, breathe deep, friend. The journey isn’t about avoiding doubt; it’s about letting it lead you to the feet of Jesus. And there, in the raw, holy space between your questions and His grace, you’ll find a love that holds you, even when the ground feels shaky. Onward, scar-toucher.





### About the Author

Kia's mission is to help you experience God in a real, everyday way—not as a distant idea, but as a loving guide who's part of your life. She believes everyone has unique gifts and purpose placed within them by God, and is here to help you discover those strengths, grow in confidence, and step into the person you were meant to be. Think of it like a journey: Kia walks with you, offering support and inspiration, as you grow closer to God, and learn to trust yourself, embrace your faith, and live a life that truly reflects who God created you to be.

As the founder of Now Faith Ministries (Now Faith) and Lead Pastor at Now Faith Church, Kia brings a wealth of experience to Now Faith and is committed to guiding others on their spiritual paths. She is also a coach and chaplain. She holds a Bachelor's degree in biblical studies and is pursuing a Master's of Divinity in Christian Counseling.

She lives in New York with her husband and four children. Kia is dedicated to fostering a vibrant community of faith and support.

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### Other Books by Kia Brown

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