

Christian Starter Kit

Twelve basic studies for beginning Christians



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How To Become A Christian

Matthew 7:7 NKJV)"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

This is the basic secret of becoming a Christian - you have to *want to follow Jesus*. I can't make you follow Jesus, no-one can. Its between you and God. In your seeking there are a few facts that make the journey a whole lot easier and quicker.

We call this set of facts "the good news of Jesus Christ" or "the gospel" for short. This article is about the gospel and attempts to give you a few facts to help you believe.

Fact 1. Everyone, absolutely everyone has fallen short of God's glorious holy standards for their lives. You might not have murdered but you probably have lied. You may not have slept with someone else's wife or husband - but you probably have hated someone or been unjust or cruel. Sin is not just sexual sin or murder, it includes being greedy, jealous, and envious. It includes our thought life too! All that we think in our imaginations is known to God. That is why Paul the apostle can write: **(Romans 3:23 NKJV) "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"**. All includes me - and it also includes you.

Fact Two: God is holy and just therefore He punishes sin. The Bible says: **(Romans 6:23 NKJV) "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Sin carries the death penalty. There are two kinds of death referred to in the Bible - physical death and eternal spiritual death. Eternal spiritual death means going into torment in Hell forever and ever, it means separation from God, from goodness, from truth, from sanity, from happiness and light. It is eternal torment and disintegration. When we refuse to follow God and obey Him we are rebelling against our Creator and the Source of Life. If we rebel against the Creator it is us who lose. It is God who sustains us, not the other way around! When we tell the Source of Life to stay away from our life and not to interfere we are actually saying "don't supply me with life". To sin, to disobey God, is to attack ourselves in the long run. Its like speeding - fun until you have to stand before the Judge. Unfortunately the sentence for a life of sin is not a speeding ticket - it is eternal death.

Fact Three: Jesus took our punishment for sin when He died upon the Cross. God prepared a way for sin could be dealt with - through special sacrifices. In the Jewish sacrificial system this was a perfect animal without spot or blemish. Jesus was sinless and was the perfect sacrifice for all the sins of all people for all time. The Bible tells us that God saw that everyone had sinned and was in danger of Hell. He decided to rescue them by sending Jesus to die instead of them. Jesus died on the cross went down into the world of the dead, took our punishment fully and was raised from the dead three days later. Our sins were "nailed to the cross" and dealt with when Jesus died.

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

Anyone who believes in Him can now have their sins forgiven because Jesus' sacrifice has provided forgiveness for everyone who wants it. Some people are too proud to want God's forgiveness. They think they can get to Heaven without the help of Jesus. But as we saw before they can't- because they, like you and I, are guilty before God. And the thing about guilt is that it takes only one crime to make you guilty and deserving of punishment. A thief cannot say "but I did not kill" and a murderer cannot say "I did not steal" - their one crime makes them guilty. So it only takes one sin to make us guilty before God and no-one can say they are good enough for heaven. We all need to accept what Jesus did for us and say thank you to God for it if we are to become true Christians.

Fact Four: The way to become a Christian is by living by two key truths. These key truths are that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He rose from the dead. The first says that He is boss of your life, of your family, and even of the government. Jesus Christ is the "ultimate authority" ; He must be obeyed. So when you

read the Bible and see a commandment of Jesus you must do it. Once you become a Christian you are like a soldier under the command of Jesus Christ. However His commands are not petty or small-minded. His commands are life-giving, true and the way to salvation and a fulfilling life. Jesus says "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Being a Christian is not meant to be an impossible struggle but a joyful celebration of life. The second thing we have to live by is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This means that we accept that He lived (how else did He die?), that He died (how else did he rise from the dead?), and that God raised Him from the dead on the third day. This means that we too will be raised from the dead to have a life that both lasts for eternity and shares the joy of heaven. The Bible states why we have to believe these things as follows:

(Romans 10:9-13 NKJV) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. {11} For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." {12} For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. {13} For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

A Prayer For Those Who Would Like To Become Christians

If you would like to become a Christian then please pray the following prayer:

Dear God, I would like to become a Christian. I know that I have not lived as you want me to. I know I need you to forgive me for all the sins I have done. I ask that you will please forgive me because of what Jesus did on the cross. I believe He died on that cross to take my sins and that You raised Him from the dead. I want to have eternal life from God so that I can follow Jesus and obey Him forever as my Lord. Please make me a Christian now. Amen.

How To Be Sure That You Really Are A Christian

(John 1:12 NKJV) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(Romans 10:9-13 NKJV) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. {11} For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." {12} For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. {13} For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

It is not uncommon for people who have just become Christians to doubt that they really are Christians. The emotions that felt so good on day one wear off and normal life seems to return. But something different has happened and your friends will notice it - often before you do. The two bible verses above give us reassurance when we start doubting that we really are Christians.

The first bible verse tells us that everyone who receives Jesus Christ into their life is given the right to become a child of God. The chief characteristic of children of God is faith they "believe in His name". This means that they trust Jesus and know that He is the way to God. Therefore if you have prayed and received Jesus Christ into your life then God has given you the right to become a child of God.

The second bible verse above tells us the two things that we need to believe if we are to truly be Christians. The first of these is that we must believe in our heart that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In order to believe this we need to believe that Jesus Christ actually lived, died on a cross and then was raised from the dead by God. This is critical to our proper understanding of Christianity. If Jesus did not really exist then our sins are not paid for by anyone and we are still in danger from God's wrath. If Jesus lived but was just a good man and a teacher but did not die on the cross then we have the same problem plus another one. His teachings are so high that unless our sins are forgiven and we have confidence before God then it would be absolutely impossible to live the Christian life. If Jesus really did die on the cross but did not rise from the dead then we would have no way of knowing if He had truly conquered death. But when we believe the well attested historical fact that Jesus did rise from the dead then we affirm all the central truths of the Christian faith.

The second thing we have to believe and live by is that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is to say that Jesus is the Supreme Commander of the universe and is above every individual, government or human structure. This means that we must obey His orders, called commandments. The sign that we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord is if we are prepared to speak it out of our mouths before other people. This is the minimum amount of Christian obedience.

Do you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead? Are you prepared to confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord? If so, the bible promises you in the book of Romans that you will be saved and that this applies to everyone who does these things. I suggest you go over these verses until you are sure in your heart that you have become a Christian.

How To Read The Bible

One of the first questions we ask is "how can I understand the bible"? The bible is a book that comes alive to Christians - but lacks impact to those who don't believe.

The best place to start is with the gospels, that is the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These books document the life of Jesus and help us to believe. They are at the beginning of the section called the New Testament. This is about three quarters of the way into your bible. Your bible should have a table of contents at the front so you can look up the various books of the bible. There are many translations of the bible available in English. In other languages there are often two or three translation available. If you look up the United Bible Societies home page on the Internet, they have many language translations available there. Try and get a bible that speaks to your heart in a language that you can understand and which is accurate to the original text. The bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages and has had to translated to all the languages of the world since. However it has always been very carefully translated and you can trust all the major bible translations.

When you read the bible take a pen and note book with you and write down the things you discover and the questions you have. Try and read about a chapter at a time and think it over carefully. Here are a few questions that will help you dig into the bible. What is this passage saying about God? What is this passage saying about Jesus? What is this passage saying about the Holy Spirit? Is there a command to obey? Is there a principal to learn? Is this saying something to my life right now? Is there a prayer I can pray? How can I apply it in my everyday life? Write the answers to these questions in your note book and you will soon build up a treasure house of scripture knowledge. It is important to pray as you read the bible. It doesn't have to be a long prayer, just something like "Dear God show me what this means and help me to obey".

It is good to read the bible in a quiet place relatively free from distraction. I read the bible in an armchair late at night when everyone else is asleep. Other people get up very early in the morning to read their bible and others find a quiet place at lunch time. There is no magic way to read the bible and it is not a magic book. You read it just like any other, using your mind and thinking hard and also allowing it to speak to your heart. As you keep reading you will find some things are said over and over again in the bible. These are the things that God wants us to pay most attention to. Commands like love one another, forgive those who have hurt you and do not judge people are in this category. These are the things you should major on. Do not get distracted into side issues or useless arguments. Read the bible to grow in Jesus Christ and to live better not to win arguments. (2 Timothy 2:14 NIV) Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

There are some books to help you read to bible. The most common helps are concordances, bible dictionaries and commentaries. Any good Christian book store will have these. There are also some very good computer programs such as Quick Verse, Logos and the On Line Bible to help you study scripture. Why not go now and start reading about the birth of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1.

For a bible reading plan see the next chapter...

Daily Bible Reading Program

The Bible is the main source of our knowledge about God. It is His inspired and authoritative Word that has the power to build faith, hope and truth into our lives. The following Daily Bible Reading Program will help you to work through the Bible systematically so that the Word of God dwells richly in your life and produces joy in your heart.

About The Bible

The Bible was written over 1500 years between about 1400 BC and 95AD. The Old Testament is God's dealings with Israel and consists of 39 books written and collected together over 1000 years from 1400BC to 400BC. Then there was a big gap of 400 years until Jesus was born. The New Testament consists of 27 books written between about 50AD and 95AD and is the record of the life and gospel of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic while the New Testament was written in Greek. Thus the Bible you read is a translation of these original ancient manuscripts which were very carefully preserved and translated.

The Index /Table Of Contents

Because the Bible was written by many people over a long period of time, the books of the Bible are not arranged alphabetically but topically, chronologically and by the type of writing. It is a bit confusing at first. So most Bibles have an Index or Table of Contents in the front. This will give you the page numbers of the various books of the Bible. So if your pastor says to look up the book of Romans, you go to the Index and find it there, and then go to the page it indicates.

The Structure Of The Bible: Testaments, Books, Chapters and Verses..

When you open your Bible and look at it you will notice it is not structured like most other books, it is written more like a legal document in which everything is numbered. It is important to understand this structure.

The Bible is divided into two **Testaments**, (a Testament is like a will or contract), the Old Testament which mainly details God's dealings with the nation of Israel and the New Testament which contains material about Jesus and the Church. Each Testament contains many separate **"books"** which were originally bible scrolls written by various prophets and apostles. The Old Testament contains 39 books and the New Testament contains 27 books.

Each book is divided into **chapters** - which generally are about one or two pages long. Each chapter is then divided into **"verses"** which are short sections of Scripture, generally about a sentence or a paragraph in length. The verse numbers were put in there to help people find their place in the Bible.

Eventually people came up with a shorthand notation to refer to bible verses that describes the book, chapter and verse. The shorthand consists of the name of the book, followed by a space, then the number of the chapter, a colon, and then the number of the verse like this: John 3:16 or Romans 8:1

So John 3:16 indicates the book of John, chapter 3, and verse 16
and Romans 8:1 indicates the book of Romans, chapter 8, and verse 1

So when someone says something like "please find James 3:16" this is what you do:

1. Go to the index and find the book of James (it is in the New Testament)
2. Go to the page number for the book of James indicated in the index.
3. Then turn the pages until you get to chapter 3
4. Then look down until you find verse 16

It is good to practice this for ten minutes or so until you get really used to it.

A Bible Reading Method You Can Use

The following is the bible reading method developed by the Scripture Union movement that promotes daily Bible reading in over 120 countries around the world. It is very simple: Pray, Read, Think, Pray

Pray: Ask God to open up His Word to you. "Lord open my eyes that I may see wonders from your Word".

Read: Read a short passage of Scripture about ten to fifteen verses or a chapter. Start with the New Testament first and read it in order from Matthew to Revelation.

Think: Think about what you have just read and ask some of the following questions:

1. What does the passage say about God? What does it say about the Father, about the Son and about the Holy Spirit?
2. What does the passage say about life? Does it teach some important principles? Is there a command to obey, a warning to heed, some wise advice for living?
3. What does the passage say about your daily situation? Is there something you should be doing? Does it shed light on your professional life, family life or church participation?
4. Has Jesus spoken to you in a special way through the Bible today? If so what did He say to you?

Pray: Write out a prayer to God based on what you have learned from your Bible reading. Something like "Lord help me to love my neighbor as myself." or whatever lesson you have learned that day.

Where To Start

Where should you start when reading the Scriptures? With the material about Jesus. That is the New Testament and especially the gospels. Here is my suggested order for reading the whole Bible. It will take about three years to finish if you read one chapter per day and one year to finish if you read 3 or 4 chapters a day.

1. Read the New Testament in order, starting with Matthew and going book by book until you reach the last chapter of Revelation. This will give you a good idea about Jesus, the Church and Christian living.
2. Then go back to the beginning of the Bible and read Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy which tells you how things began and God's order for Creation, mankind and society.
3. Then read the Psalms in order from 1 to 50 then take a break (there are 150 of them).
4. Read Isaiah 40-66, Daniel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Haggai, Zechariah, Lamentations and Malachi which should help you grasp the prophets.
5. Then read Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Solomon - known as the Wisdom Literature.
6. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles - this will give you a good grasp of the history of Israel.

7. Then go back and read the New Testament from start to finish all over again.
8. Then go back and read another 50 Psalms (51-100)
9. Then tackle the Old Testament laws in Leviticus and Numbers.
10. More prophets - Ezekiel, Isaiah 1-39, Jeremiah these are the "major prophets"
11. Finish with some less known books Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, & Zephaniah
12. Then finish the last 50 Psalms (101-150)

What Is The Best Bible To Use?

Many people are confused by the large number of different bible translations available. This has come about because the Bible was written in three original languages Hebrew (most of the Old Testament) Aramaic (some of the OT) and Greek trade language of the 1st century known as koine Greek (the New Testament). There are basically four types of bibles depending on how they choose to do the translation process:

Literal translations: These translate the bible with word by word and are very accurate. While they are very faithful to the original text they can be somewhat clumsy when put into English. Literal translations include the King James version, The New King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New American Standard Bible. My favorites here are the New American Standard Bible and the New King James version.

Dynamic translations: Are translated phrase by phrase or concept by concept. They are still quite accurate but not as literally accurate as those above. They are much easier to read and understand. They include the Good News Bible, the New international Version, The Contemporary English Version and many others. The NIV is the best dynamic translation. For people using English as a second language the Contemporary English version is excellent.

Paraphrases: Very loose translations of the bible they rearrange the material within each paragraph so it flows smoothly and put the bible into very contemporary concepts. They should not be used for in-depth bible study but are very easy for daily bible reading. Many find them helpful but personally I do not use them. They include the Message, the Living Bible, the New Living Bible, and many others.

Wrong or Misleading Translations: These include the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses and other versions produced by cults. It also includes the Amplified Bible which includes words in brackets that can seriously mislead some readers.

From all the above here are my recommendations:

Translations: You should use the most accurate version available in your heart language. It should also be sufficiently modern for you to read it easily. The King James or Authorized Version is a very accurate Bible but was written four centuries ago in a different form of English known as Elizabethan English. Many of the words it uses are now obsolete or have changed meaning for instance the word "prevent" means "to go before" in the King James Version and the word "handsome" means sly and tricky - not attractive. So because it can confuse people I do not generally recommend the King James Version. The New King James Version is an equally accurate translation with more modern English and is the main one I use. Other good translations include: NASB (New American Standard Bible), NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), and the NIV (New International Version). Some easy to read but not so accurate translations include The Living Bible (LB) , The New Living Bible (NLB), The Message, The Good News Bible(GNB) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV). Avoid some poor translations such as the New World Translation by the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Amplified Bible - both contain serious errors. I mainly use the New King James Version and the New American Standard Bible as they are very accurate translations.

Study Bibles: A study bible is a bible translation plus footnotes that explain the text and help the reader to grasp its message. They are very useful and every Christian should own one. The NIV

Study Bible is the bible I give to people when they are converted. The NIV translation is easy to read, quite accurate and the notes and helps in the NIV Study Bible are excellent. The Open Bible with a New King James Version translation would also be a very good choice. If you want just one Bible version the ones I recommend are The Open Bible, the Thompson Chain Reference Bible and the NIV Study Bible. The Open Bible and the Thompson Chain Reference have the advantage of having a variety of translations available in their formats.

Finding The Time

Fifteen minutes is about all you need to read a chapter of the Bible, think, take a few notes, then pray. I do my daily bible reading first thing in the morning as I wake up with my first cup of coffee for the day. Other people have their 'quiet time' on the train on the way to work or at lunch on a bench in the park. For many years I had my bible reading time at night just before I went to bed. Any time that you can carve out as a habit on every day of the week is the best time. Find a quiet place where you can pray and read and think in private and follow the Scripture Union method above. We "find time" for those things that are important to us and surely meeting God in His Word should be the most important thing in our lives. You do not have to use special words or kneel down or adopt a special bodily posture, it is the attitude of your heart that counts. I like praying as I walk.

Books and Resources That Can Help You Understand The Bible

1. *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth* by Gordon Stuart and Douglas Fee is a truly excellent book that will help you understand how the Bible should be read. IVP press I think. Available in most good Christian bookstores. Other good books about the Bible include: *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* by Josh McDowell, *The New Testament Documents Are They Reliable?* by F.F. Bruce and *The Canon of Scripture* by F.F. Bruce.
2. **Commentaries** - these analyze passages of the bible in-depth. The Tyndale commentary series is good enough for most people while pastors and bible students might want to use the Word commentaries or the New International commentaries on the OT and NT. Some good one volume commentaries that treat the whole Bible in one volume are available - just ask your Christian bookstore. An excellent older devotional commentary is Matthew Henry's commentary.
3. **Maps and Archaeology/Bible Lands** - Knowing a bit about the life and times, history and culture of people in Bible lands can be fascinating and very helpful. The New Bible Dictionary is a modern up to date compilation that helps you find all you need to know about the life and culture. Good material is also available on the Internet and on CD-ROM.
4. **Concordances/Bible Programs** - a concordance is like an extensive index to the Bible that lists the words in the Bible and where they can be found. They are very helpful in bible study so that you can easily find all the verses on "money" or some other topic and find out all the Bible has to say about it. Bible programs allow you to do this very quickly on a computer and have many other helps as well. Good concordances include Strong's, Young's and Cruden's while good bible search programs include Quickverse, and Logos.

How To Pray

The Lord's Prayer

(Matthew 6:5-18 NKJV) "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {6} "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. {7} "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. {8} "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. {9} "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. {10} Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. {11} Give us this day our daily bread. {12} And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. {13} And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. {14} "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. {15} "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. {16} "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {17} "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, {18} "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Some basic truths about prayer....

The passage above tells us a few very basic truths about prayer. They are that we should pray:

- 1) Believing that God hears what we pray even in secret.
- 2) We are not to pray for public show but so as to be heard by God.
- 3) That we are to pray for God's honour and glory and Christian work (His Kingdom). For things to be done right on earth as they are in heaven, for our basic needs, for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. This is a balanced prayer diet that proceeds from the most important items to the less important and which starts us praying in a positive and worshipful way.
- 4) The Lord's prayer can be used as a "backbone" to hang other prayers off. When you pray "Thy kingdom come..it can trigger you praying for something happening in your church, or on the mission field or the salvation of a friend. And so on with each of the sections of the Lord's prayer triggering appropriate reflections and requests.

Where, When and How To Pray

(Luke 5:16 NKJV) So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

(Hebrews 5:7 NKJV) who (Jesus), in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

When Jesus prayed it was often:

- a) alone
- b) in a quiet place
- c) with deep emotion and intimate language to God who He called "Abba Father" (literally "Daddy")
- d) with force and persistence
- e) with holiness and godly fear.

This is a good pattern for you to follow. Find a quiet place, take your Bible and pour out your heart to God as fully as you can in a godly and reverent way. The words are not that important. God understands you. Just speak in a way that is respectful and truthful and yet bold and which really asks big things of God.

He is our Father and He wants children that are willing to speak what is in their heart to Him.

What Is God Like?

How The Bible Describes God

(Psalms 90:1-2 NKJV) LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. {2} Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

(Exodus 34:6-7 NKJV) And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, {7} "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

(Isaiah 6:1-4 NKJV) In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. {2} Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. {3} And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" {4} And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

These are just some of the descriptions of God in the Bible. They tell us that God is everlasting and unchanging, that He is merciful, kind and gracious, that He is just and faithful, that He is holy and without sin. He is abounding in goodness and truth. He is a God we can trust utterly.

God Is Like Jesus

Above all God is like Jesus. Jesus is the "perfect image" of God. Jesus came to show us exactly what God is like. (John 14:9b-10a NKJV) He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? {10} "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?. And (Hebrews 1:1-3 NKJV) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, {2} has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,..... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." And....(John 1:18 NKJV) {18} No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Jesus is kind because God is kind. Jesus healed people because God likes to heal people. Jesus liked the poor because God likes the poor. Jesus taught the truth because God is Truth. Jesus was sinless because God is sinless and Jesus taught with authority because God is God. Jesus tells us what God is like but as an "image" as a small scale representation that we can understand. Jesus, though He was God, did not hurl galaxies around while He was on earth. He became like God at a human level. Jesus is our clearest signpost to what God is like. Jesus was uncompromising yet merciful, kind yet full of truth, wise yet humble. He always acted in love because God always acts in love and freedom. He is utterly free and wishes us to be free also.

Jesus used His great power to heal and help others. God also wants to use His great power to heal and help you. If you have prayed to receive Jesus Christ into your life and if you have submitted your life to Him the God's power is in you. Jesus Christ and all His power, resources and love has come to dwell in you. You have a huge power source right in the middle of your life. Call out to God and ask Him now to help you, to heal you and to show you how much power and love He has put inside you so you can continue to walk with Him.

What Has Happened To Me?

From Darkness To Light

(Ephesians 2:1-10 NKJV) And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, {2} in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, {3} among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. {4} But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, {5} even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), {6} and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, {7} that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. {8} For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, {9} not of works, lest anyone should boast. {10} For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The Big Change

There has been a huge change in your life. You have moved from being "dead in trespasses and sins" to being "alive together with Christ". God's life, which is "eternal life" has been put into your heart. God has come to live in you and be at home in your life. You have started to "come alive" and "wake up" to all sorts on new things. Things that were nonsense before now start to make some sense and there is a deep desire for God and for holiness in your heart. You want to belong to Jesus and to obey Him. You want to be with other believers and read the Bible and go to church. You want to do good things and you want to get rid of the bad things in your life. A new life principle is operating within you. Whereas before the life principle of sin and death led you now the life principle of righteousness and peace leads you. You are a different person. Your life is so different and so new that you can say "I have been born again" (John 3:1-18).

To fully understand this change you must realise that before you became a Christian you were a controlled person. You were controlled by "the prince of the power of the air" - the Devil. He might not have been around pestering you all the time but anytime he wanted he could "press your buttons" and you would do what he commanded. You were being spiritually manipulated by an evil power. That is why even "good people" who are not Christians end up doing things they are ashamed of and regret. Now Satan's ability to press your buttons are gone. They are no longer available to him. However you still have a storehouse of bad habits that you have made your own, a whole heap of wrong desires, angry thoughts and boastful intentions that are dear to your heart and for many people a whole bird's nest of confusion and anxiety that still has to be dealt with. God will clear these things up for you if you ask Him. He is your Saviour - not you yourself. He will rescue you from both the penalty and power of sin and very graciously from some of its consequences as well.

Why does He rescue you - is it that he likes being a sort of life-saver" Or is there more to it than that? God certainly delights in saving people but He does so for a purpose - that they may live holy and responsible lives and fulfill the plans and purposes that He has created for us. Note verse 10 above "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." By being God's workmanship it means He deliberately made you, and deliberately made you a certain way. By "good works which He prepared beforehand.." means that God has a plan for your life, a plan full of good works for you to do. These good works will flow from the kind of person that He has made you to be. Lastly there is the phrase "for us to do.." that means you and I have to be active "doing" Christians putting our new lives into practice each day.

Meeting God's People

The First Church (when the apostles lived)

(Acts 4:32-35 NKJV) Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. {33} And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. {34} Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, {35} and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

A New People - A People of God

Being a Christian means being part of a "new people" (Ephesians 2:15, 2 Cor 5:17) we are introduced to the "household of God" (Ephesians 2:19) and have brothers and sisters in the faith. This means that something wonderful and supernatural can happen when believers gather together. The Holy Spirit dwell in the midst of God's people making it a 'temple of the Holy Spirit'. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NKJV) "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? {17} If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." These verses indicate that there are very severe consequences for people who disrupt or harm God's people - the church.

God uses different Christians in different ways. Some are powerful preachers, others can help the poor, yet others see are very good at praying while another person may possess gifts of leadership and administration. (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) We are like the parts of a body - some are "legs", others "ears", others "eyes" and so no. The Bible sometimes calls the church 'the body of Christ' we are the visible, on-this-earth representation of Jesus Christ. If Jesus wants to care for someone He will us a part of "His body" to do it. You and I thus have important functions in this world. We are not to be jealous or envious of one another but to build one another up in love - just as in our human body the arms acre for the head etc. We are to be a team. Much hurt can come when Christians compete with one another. This is absolutely wrong, We are to "maintain the spirit of unity in the bond of peace".

A Good Church

When you look for a church check to see that it has the following four things:

- 1. Sound biblical preaching that lifts up Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and God.
- 2. Humble , godly and wise leadership. ("Red flag" attitudes include: greed, pride, moral looseness, and disrespect.)
- 3. The people of the church clearly love one another.
- 4. There is holiness and clear standards of right and wrong.

If you are unsure about a church then talk to some wise Christians that you know and ask their opinion of it. Or e-mail me at johnedmiston@yahoo.com . I will not favour one particular denomination over another but seek to give you sound principles and advice.

A Bad Church

There are some groups you need to watch out for:

1. Avoid groups that claim their particular group is the only group that will enter the Kingdom of God. They are often full of unsound teaching and manipulative practices.
2. Avoid groups that refuse to be upfront with you on the first meeting.
3. Avoid groups that are centered around a particular human leader who is often made out to be an infallible guide. Particularly if they ask for large sums of money.
4. Avoid groups that do not see Jesus as the only way to salvation or which mix together Christianity and other religions or which have "unique teachings" about Jesus.
5. Avoid groups that participate in the occult or which condone some forms of immorality.
6. Avoid groups that have "their own version" of the Scriptures or which add to the Bible.

Loving the Church

Once you have found a good church (there are no perfect churches) stick with it despite the ups and downs. Churches are full of people like you who make mistakes, aren't quite perfect and say things they do not really mean. One day someone may say or do something that really hurts you. Stick with it then - don't get bitter towards all Christians because of a foolish one or two. Remember some people who attend church are not really born again. Some are still searching, some are pretending, but the vast majority are really nice people. Here are three things you should take to church each Sunday.

- 1. Your heart to be filled with the Spirit. Go with an open and expectant attitude and you will receive.
- 2. Your eyes and your hands - to watch for the needs of the people of God and meet them in practical ways.
- 3. Your mind - to hear, understand and think about God's word. Some Christians think that faith and their minds cannot mix. That is wrong. It is true that faith and a puffed up and arrogant mind cannot mix. But faith and an *inquiring mind* go hand in hand and create wisdom, knowledge grace and truth.

Breaking Free From Sin

We Have The Power To No Longer Live In Sin

(Romans 6:5-23 NKJV) For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, {6} knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. {7} For he who has died has been freed from sin. {8} Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, {9} knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. {10} For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. {11} Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

{Romans 6:12} Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. {13} And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. {14} For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. {15} What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! {16} Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

{Romans 6:17} But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. {18} And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. {19} I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. {20} For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. {21} What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. {22} But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. {23} For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(1 John 3:9 NKJV) Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

The Struggle With Sin

The Bible makes clear that Christians have victory over both the penalty and power of sin. We often find it difficult to believe this because of the intense struggle we have with "sin in our members". (Romans 7, Galatians 5:16-18) 1 John gives us a clue on how to think about this when it says "he cannot sin because he has been born of God" - who cannot sin - that part of us that has been born of God and is a new creation in Christ! Christ in us is sin-free - as sinless as he was here on earth! When we die and God takes us to heaven then we will not sin any more. The part of us that lasts forever is free from sin. In fact it is so completely unresponsive to sin that it can be said to be "dead to sin". Our true eternal selves are sinless.

This is a powerful truth that can help us live the Christian life. There are two parts of us in conflict "the flesh" which is temporary and which stops having any influence after we die or Christ returns, and the spirit which is eternal, spotless, undefiled and holy. Hence another name for all Christians is "saints" or "holy ones" because our true, essential selves are holy we can be called "holy ones". Now this battle between the flesh and the spirit can be very intense and very discouraging. In fact the apostle Paul cries out (Romans 7:21 NKJV) " I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good." This is the experience of all Christians and often makes us feel very condemned.

However **there is a solution** to this problem!

(Galatians 5:16-18 NKJV) I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. {17} For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. {18} But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(Romans 8:1-6 NKJV) There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. {2} For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. {3} For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, {4} that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. {5} For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. {6} For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The solution then is to fill your life with the things of the Spirit and to direct your mind into the things of God so that "the flesh" and its interests do not get a look in. Set your mind on the things of the Spirit and you will have life and peace. To do this you should regularly pray, read the Bible, live according to its teachings and meet with other Christians.

The more time you make for God - the less there will be for sin and self-defeat.

In particular pray for these things :

- Grace- God to be kind toward you and give you many undeserved favours and the power to resist sin.
- Mercy - for God to deliver you from the messes you get yourself into especially when we are ignorant/foolish.
- Peace - the integration of your life under the blessings of God so that sin has no foothold in you.
- Understanding - of what God has done for in Christ and the power over sin that is within you.
- Wisdom & Discernment - so you can apply your understanding to real life situations.
- To Be Filled With The Love of God - which takes over our hearts and makes thinking spiritual thoughts easy.
- To Be Filled With The Spirit - and able to see and perceive the things of God so that we are bold and joyful.

What About Heaven And Hell

The Bible Describes Judgment Day

(Matthew 13:47-50 NKJV) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, {48} "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. {49} "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, {50} "and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

(Revelation 20:10-15 NKJV) {10} The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. {11} Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (Revelation 20:12-15 NKJV) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. {13} The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. {14} Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. {15} And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

The Fixed-Up & Made New World

(Revelation 21:1-4 NKJV) Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. {2} Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. {3} And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. {4} "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Heaven & Hell

God is holy and must deal with sin. Sin can be dealt by us through repentance and faith and following Jesus in the pursuit of holiness. This way of dealing with sin leads to heaven. Or sin can accumulate and "store up the wrath of God for the Day of Judgment". People who have not dealt with their sin by repentance, faith and following Jesus will be destroyed - cast into the lake of fire. They are not deserving of, or fit for, heaven. They do not have a sinless "real self" (see the [AIBI article on the Inner Man](#)). Their real self is still sinful and wicked. Therefore it is destroyed and punished. Hell is not a sort of debauched party full of sinners having a good time, it is unrelenting anguish without any place for or possibility of rest and relief.

Heaven is the absolute enjoyment of the presence and power of God. It is where God's love is perfectly understood and where absolute total blissful happiness is normal. In heaven there will be no more crying or pain. It is ended. The days of suffering, meaninglessness, misfortune and calamity are over. It is a world ordered for good and for the very best. Should you go to heaven you will dwell in unimaginable wealth - yet without coveting, you will reign with Christ - in humility and meekness, you will have a life that goes on for all eternity full of purpose, love and meaning. It will be a place where every scar on your soul is healed, where every tear is forgotten and where the life of God flows through you like an ever flowing stream. (Revelation 21&22)

What About My Non-Christian Friends?

When Friends Lead You Astray From God

Sometimes our non-Christian friends can be leading a lifestyle that is sinful, and they will want us to join in and pressure them to “go along” and compromise our values. We should still love our non-Christian friends and we definitely should share Christ with them, but we should not give in and conform to their lifestyle. This article deals with the problem of pressure from non-Christian friends who ask us to do something wrong.

(1 Corinthians 15:33-34 NKJV) Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." {34} Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. (James 4:4-5 NKJV) Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. {5} Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 NKJV) Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? {15} And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? {16} And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." {17} Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." {18} "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

These verse are amongst the hardest in the Bible and they are there for a purpose. It is very easy to end up in relationships or alliances that are really counterproductive to our Christian faith. We are heading one way and they are heading another. Lets review these verse carefully.

1. Bad company corrupts good habits. This is an easily observed commonplace fact. Many new Christians try to keep company with people who are sexually immoral or drunken or greedy or ambitious and the pressure from these friendships soon draws them away from their relationship with Christ and back into the world. Recognise bad company - and avoid it.
2. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. There are three main enemies of God - and of Christians. Those enemies are "the world, the flesh and the devil". By the world the Bible means "Vanity Fair" the place where people clamber to get up the ladder, gain honors and be thought of as special without any reference to God or to eternity.(1 John 2:15-17 NKJV) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. {17} And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." Living for material gain, worldly status or sensual pleasure is what we call worldliness. It is incompatible with the Spirit of God. You cannot think and act "like everyone else" and be God's friend.(Romans 12:1,2) You cannot live for this world and for heaven at the same time. Possessions are not the stuff of the Kingdom of God.
3. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This passage is often quoted to say that Christians should not marry non-Christians. That is certainly true. We should only marry "in the Lord". However it is of broader application than that. This passage says that we are not to "yoke ourselves with" that is get into partnerships or close friendships with unbelievers where it is necessary that we "pull in the same direction". This may include boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, close friendships, some business arrangements and anything where we could be compromised by the friendship. The spiritual nature of unbelievers is that they are controlled people.(Ephesians 2:1-4) They are controlled by "Belial", the Devil, and he can "push their buttons" from time to time

so that they do what he wants 'despite themselves". This makes the partnership very unwise for Christians. Satan wants to "steal, kill and destroy" the people of God (John 10:10) and you have foolishly placed yourself right alongside someone who the Devil can control to do you maximum harm. That person may not will you any harm now but their weakness and vulnerabilities mean that they can "fall into sin" and take you with them. They do not have the strength to resist a strong temptation from the Evil One. This is a hard lesson to learn because many unbelievers are nice, attractive people. Older Christians have often learned this lesson the hard way and many will tell you of the pain they have suffered. You are not judging the person by denying the relationship. You are obeying God and He promises you and even better relationship if you follow Him.

(2 Cor 6:16-18 NKJV)"For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." {17} Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." {18} "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

The application of this requires courage and wisdom. Courage to make the break from damaging relationships and wisdom in how and when to do it and with what words. Putting distance between yourself and the person does not mean an entire rejection of their personality. You are not to hate anyone. You are to love them with a cautious and wise love that refuses to get involved beyond the boundaries set by God.

Loving Your Neighbor

The Story Of The Good Samaritan

(Luke 10:25-37 NKJV) And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" {26} He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" {27} So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" {28} And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." {29} But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" {30} Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. {31} "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. {32} "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. {33} "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. {34} "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. {35} "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' {36} "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" {37} And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Love Of Neighbor

Love of God and love of neighbor are the two great commandments. They are repeated dozens of times in the Scriptures e.g. (1 John 3:16-18 NKJV) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. {17} But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? {18} My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." There is a compelling weight to these exhortations. We MUST do the good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). This page is devoted to showing you how to fulfill this commandment. From the above parable we can see that the Good Samaritan a) perceived the need b) bothered to get involved in the mess c) paid the price of following it through to completion d) did so in an open-hearted attitude full of mercy and generosity. The Good Samaritan also got on with his business and let the person recover in peace. He was not a busybody or a sanctimonious do-gooder. There is something brusquely practical about him, almost businesslike.

Step One When we see a brother or sister in need we can give whatever immediate help we can from the resources we have available (and God always gives you enough to meet the need once you start using it "the loaves and fishes" principle - Matt 14:14-21). We must never ignore the need. To "close our hearts" is to squelch the love of God in us. (1 John 3:17)

Step Two We can then refer them to someone more able to help ("the innkeeper") but be prepared to still be involved and pick up the tab if necessary. This may mean taking them to AA or Social Security and standing with them until things are sorted out.

Step Three Check our attitude. Are we being generous or are we resenting "having to get involved"? Are we merciful and gracious or do we view the person as foolish? Are we helping out in order to boost ourselves or because we had compassion on that person? We should still help even if though our motives are very mixed and pride creeps in. It is better to meet the need because that way we are keeping our hearts open to the love and mercy of God - these will, in time, correct our attitudes.

May I suggest an set of priorities for Christian compassion -

- 1. Our spouse
- 2. Our children
- 3. Our aged parents
- 4. The church,
- 5. The basic needs of the world.

Here are some verses that underlie my order of priorities:

(Ephesians 5:28 NKJV) So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

(1 Timothy 5:8 NKJV) But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(Mark 7:9-13 NKJV) He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. {10} "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' {11} "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"; ' (that is, a gift to God), {12} "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, {13} "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

(Galatians 6:9-10 NKJV) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. {10} Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

From Galatians we see that "doing good" is "especially" to Christians. From Mark we see that church comes behind parents, 1Timothy says that providing for one's family is absolutely basic to being a Christian and Ephesians that spouses hold a very high place indeed - as high as our own bodies.

This is a common sense order and may help you sort out your helping role. Do not use it as an excuse though! Remember we are exhorted in Galatians to "do good to all" .(Gal 6:10)

How To Release The Holy Spirit Into Your Life

Bible Verses

(Ephesians 5:18-21 NKJV) And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, {19} speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, {20} giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, {21} submitting to one another in the fear of God.

(Luke 11:11-13 NKJV) "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? {12} "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? {13} "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

(Matthew 3:11-12 NKJV) "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. {12} "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Acts 2:33 NKJV) "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Overview

The aim of this article is to inform you of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and to encourage you to live a life that either suddenly or gradually increases in victory and power. It is not the aim of this article to turn you into a charismatic or a Pentecostal. I want to show you some of what is available in the Kingdom of God and encourage to lay hold upon it. There is a lot more to church and the Christian life than hard work and duty. There is joy, there is peace of mind, there is a whole new fresh way of living in the gentle power of the Holy Spirit.

Here is a quick tour: We can ask God to give us the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) and to fill us with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). Scripture tells us that Jesus "baptizes" us with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11,12, Acts 2:33), that is He pours it out in power on believers so they can function in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). The prime work of the Holy Spirit is making believers like Jesus (Romans 8:26-31) and enabling them to minister to one another in love and truth (Ephesians 4:11-16). This involves spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-11) being used in love (1 Cor 13:1-7) for mutual edification. Being filled with the Spirit is God's will (Eph 5:18) and is also a CHOICE we can make as an alternative to a lifestyle of dissipation (Eph 5:18). It produces true spiritual joy (Eph 5:18-21) and can be sought through prayer (Luke 11:9-13).

Asking God For The Holy Spirit

Sometimes very precious spiritual things can be lost or "unclaimed". At one time the book of Deuteronomy itself was lost! Until it was discovered in the Temple by Josiah. Life in the power of God with the infilling presence of the Holy Spirit was a New Testament reality that, like the book of Deuteronomy, got "lost in the attic" for a long while. It is now being rediscovered by countless Christians. So they go searching, and those who seek, find and those who ask, receive and to those who knock the door shall be opened. We need to press into God for more and more of His Kingdom realities and a deeper filling with the Holy Spirit.

Believers receive the Holy Spirit at conversion and then ideally deepen their relationship with Him over the years. The "linkages" between the believer and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit grow stronger and more effective. The believer grows in wisdom grace and power and from time to time experiences breakthroughs in their walk with God that I shall call "releases" of the Holy Spirit. We don't get "more of" the Holy Spirit in a quantity (you cannot get more of a person and the Holy Spirit is personal) but we get "more" in the sense of relationship and power. Love relationships can, in a way, be measured. Have you ever heard a wife can say to her husband "I want all of you ..." Thus from our perspective we can get

"more of the Holy Spirit" that is sense the reality of His Presence with us more deeply and with greater reality. We can move into a deeper, stronger and more committed relationship full of peace, joy and power.

How Do We Do This?

The release of the Holy Spirit into your life involves seeking, repenting and asking. There are many obstacles in our hearts that choke the Spirit's work. These include bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, unbelief, being too controlling, immorality and involvement in pornography or the occult. You cannot have the fullness of Holy Spirit and bitterness. You will have to choose between the two.

(Ephesians 4:30-32 NKJV) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. {31} Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. {32} And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

As we seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit we will often become aware of areas that are contrary to His operation in us. As we repent of them then the Holy Spirit is no longer grieved and His joy fills us. In true revivals we see that there is always seeking God, there is always repenting and there is always asking for more and more of his Presence and power.

I do not have a "formula" for seeking, repenting and asking. I cannot tell you how long it will take or exactly what you should do. Some people are greatly assisted by certain forms of worship, others by fasting and self-denial, others by a daily quiet time with God. Whatever the method you use it must involve earnest and diligent seeking, repenting and asking of God.

Obstacles

If its just that simple why is not revival, at least on the personal level, far more common? Because we tenaciously hold on to certain sins and attitudes that block the operation of God. We distrust the surgeon who can save us. For instance if we: nationalize certain sins away particularly those involving money or sex. Refuse to forgive people under the banner of "justice" place limits on how God can work today. Think we are respectable and do not need renewal. Despise renewal and the miraculous. Play around with the Scriptures, believing some and discarding some. Keep idols and occult items in our house "for cultural value" (see Deut 7:25) play with astrology, Wicca, fortune-telling or contact the dead. Think that if we let God in He will "make us missionaries in Tibet" and ruin our happiness. Think we are unworthy of God's love or of him doing anything wonderful in our lives. See renewal as being for "other people in other lands at other times", give up our pursuit of God far too easily. Invent theologies that have God as remote. Do not acknowledge Jesus as the only way to salvation. (Surprisingly common)

To address all these blockages one by one would be a very long article indeed! What we do need to do however is to stop sinning against God and start loving Him enthusiastically with our whole hearts. As we do this and repent of the above list of sins then a renewed life will become a real and wonderful possibility. God may renew people before they have fully repented of their involvement with the above sins but I have never seen renewal without at least some serious dealing with sin on the part of the person involved.

Seven Steps

To do this is a seven step process:

1. Acknowledge your sin before God. Tell God that He is righteous and just and that you agree with His assessment of your sin.
2. Acknowledge the sin's grip on you and your desire to be free of it forever.
3. Ask for God's forgiveness of your sin.
4. Ask Jesus to fill you with His Holy Spirit.
5. Make restitution and reconcile with those you may have hurt. If the sin is only between you and God

then leave it there. If it involves one other person go put it right with just that person. If it involves a group then acknowledge that to the group and seek their forgiveness.

6. Destroy any objects involved with your sin e.g. pornography or objects and books used in witchcraft, astrology, pagan religions, idolatry, masonry, etc. (See Deuteronomy 7:5, 25 and Acts 19:19)

7. Press on to higher ground through obedience, prayer, fellowship and bible study. Get involved in the things of God. God only gives you power and strength so you can use it to bless others.

Building On The Blessing

Once you have received a releasing of the Holy Spirit into your life you need to build on it for ministry and service and growth in Christian character. The blessings of God are not sensual moments to be enjoyed like good music or a meal. They are stepping stones to holiness, Christian character and a blessed and productive life that is useful in building the Kingdom of God here on earth.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you in power there is a tendency to gain an extra level of functioning known as a "spiritual gift". In Samson's case it was great strength, in Solomon's it was wisdom, in Peter the ability to work miracles, in Paul the apostolic gift and calling. This extra level of functioning needs to be learned and practiced so that it integrates with the whole of life and with God's purposes for His church. Spiritual gifts are not status symbols any more than the servant's towel is a status symbol. The spiritual gifts are there for you to use the power of God in love for the edification and support of other believers and the conversion of those outside the Kingdom.

Do not leave your blessing gift wrapped in a silver box. Take it out and use it. Admiring what God has just done for you is good, but it will soon be time to put your new level of functioning to use in the real world. If the renewal has left you more peaceful it will be time to show that at work when you are under pressure. If it has made you more loving then display that love at home and grow it and strengthen it.