

STARTING STRONG

Beginning Your Journey with Jesus Christ

JOSH FRANKLIN

Starting Strong
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ISBN: xxx-x-xxxxxx-xx-x

L'Edge Press
PO Box 1652, Boone, NC 28607
website: ledgepress.com, email: ledgepress@gmail.com

Josh Franklin
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MY DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST

I, _____ gave my life to Jesus
Christ on ___/___/_____ at _____ a.m./p.m. when I
was at _____.
I began this book on ___/___/_____ and will complete it.

(your signature and date)

Philippians 3:8-9 (CEV) "8Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ 9and to know that I belong to him...God accepted me simply because of my faith in Christ."

Dear Friend:

I just want to say how proud I am for you making the most important decision of your life. Surrendering your life to Christ and the decision to follow Him are the greatest steps you have ever taken or will take. You are now part of God's great family! When you were born physically, you were born as a baby and naturally grew up over time. Well, in this spiritual experience you received, you entered God's family as a baby, and you need to grow up into your salvation! *1 Peter 2:2, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."*

This book has been written specifically for you, and it is very important to take your time while you are working through it. By receiving Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have access to all that God is and has. Your personal joy, however, will depend on your daily faithfulness to obey God's commands. You must be faithful to God. Love Jesus more than anything else this world can offer. Put Him first in your life and it will be filled with joy.

- *Strengthen your walk by reading the Bible every day.*
- *Hide God's Word in your heart.*
- *Depend on God through prayer.*
- *Talk to other people about Christ.*
- *Join others in a Bible-believing Church.*
- *Serve Him with your life!*

May God strengthen you in your love and devotion to Him as you work your way through this book.

— Josh Franklin

THE STORY SO FAR

Truth Statements I Must Believe

If you truly gave your life to Jesus Christ, here are the facts that you have been convinced of already...

1. God Loves You. – *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

.....
Truth Statement #1:

I believe that God _____ me.

.....

2. Your Sin Separated You From a Loving God. – *“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2)*

.....
Truth Statement #2:

I believe that my _____ separated me from a _____ God.

.....

3. God Sent Jesus To Take Care of the Sin Barrier Between You and Him. – *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)*
-

.....
Truth Statement #3:

_____ sent _____ to take care
of the sin _____ between me and God.
.....

4. We Respond To God by Receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. – *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)*
.....

Truth Statement #4:

I respond to God by receiving _____ as
_____ and _____.
.....

THE STORY SO FAR

Decisions I Must Make

If you truly gave your life to Jesus Christ, these are the decisions you made:

1. You were a hopeless sinner, and you needed Jesus. – *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)*

.....

Decision #1:

I am a _____ sinner, and I _____ Jesus.

.....

2. You were willing to turn completely from the sins that held you captive. – *“I tell you, No; but unless you repent (change your mind for the better and heartily amend your ways, with abhorrence of your past sins), you will all likewise perish and be lost eternally.” (Luke 13:3, AMP)*

.....

Decision #2:

I am willing to _____ completely from the _____ that _____ me captive.

.....

3. You believed that Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, actually died for you on the cross and rose from the grave. – *“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. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10)*
-

.....
Decision #3:

I believe that Jesus Christ, God's only _____,
actually _____ for me on the _____ and
_____ from the grave.

.....

4. Through prayer, you invited Jesus Christ to come in and control your life, making Him Lord.
-

Decision #4:

If you truly gave your life to Jesus Christ, you probably prayed a prayer similar to this one...

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a hopeless sinner, and I need your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as Lord and Savior, from this day forth, as best as I know how. In Jesus' name, Amen."

.....

You may have read this and said, "I did all of this," then, my friend, you are a child of God – don't let the devil, your family or your friends try to talk you out of it! God has changed you on the inside, even if you don't feel or look any different. Believe it! You have it!

You may have read this and said, "I did not do this," then, my friend, today is the day that you can come to Christ for the first time. You can read this again, pray that prayer and Jesus will save you from your sin! You, too, will be a child of God! The prayer does not save you, but praying a prayer like this one, from your heart to God, is the way Jesus will

enter your life and you will be completely changed! Do it today! Make your salvation sure!

Yes, I have given my life to Jesus Christ!

(sign)

(date)

How to Use this Book:

1. Secure an easy to understand translation, like an NIV or a NKJV, to use with this booklet. Also, keep a pencil or pen handy for notes and to answer the questions.
 2. Try to give yourself enough time to be able to get through one whole section.
 3. The purpose of this book is to help you discover in your own Bible the truths that are seen in Scripture. Read the questions, turn to the Scripture references, and read them.
 4. Think about the answers and write them down. Remember, there are no trick questions.
-

Lesson 1

AM I REALLY DIFFERENT?

God Has Changed You On The Inside

You need to know what has happened on the inside of you since Jesus came into your heart.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Here Jesus says that you are a new person when you give your life to Him. When you said, "Jesus, I'm hopeless. I'm turning from my sins. Come into my life," Jesus came in and gave you a completely new heart. This is why we call it being "born again". It is not being physically born again, but rather, being spiritually born again. It is receiving God's life on the inside of you.

.....

Being "born again" actually means "receiving _____ life on the _____."

.....

You don't look any different on the outside. If you needed a bath before you got born again, you still need a bath. If you had wrinkles on your face before you got born again, look in the mirror – you still have those same wrinkles.

God doesn't come in to give you a physical makeover. He comes in to give you His life on the inside of you. This can be called a spiritual makeover. Jesus said in John 10:10, "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*"

Your outside did not receive this new life, but your inside did. You will never be the same again!

Over the next few weeks, you may feel as though you have been born again, like the slate is clean, like you have been given a fresh start. You may not feel like that, but the truth of God's Word says that *"the old life is gone. A new life has begun."*

.....

Colossians 1:27b, "...And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory." (NLT)

.....

Make a decision today that you will never again turn to the same sins that held you bound before you came to Christ. Make a decision today that you will allow God's life to change you from the inside out! He will do it. It will take time, but the Christian life is not a sprint, it's a marathon that will last throughout eternity! The Christian life is not about perfection, or how sinless you can get; but about direction, or what direction are you going – towards Christ and away from sin, or towards sin and away from Christ – you choose!

Questions:

1. What is a term used to describe "receiving God's life on the inside"? _____

2. According to Colossians 1:27, Who lives in me now?

Lesson 2
HOW CAN I BE SURE?
Be Sure Of Your Salvation

God wants you to be sure of your salvation. Though sometimes you will not feel as close to the Lord as other times, your standing with God is a solid fact, based upon God's Word.

There are two things that are clear in God's Word about being sure of one's salvation.

1. **God wants His children to have the assurance of their salvation.** God does not want us to walk around with doubts and fears about whether we are saved or not. *1 John 5:13 says, "My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life." (MSG)*

Sometimes you don't "feel" like you are saved. Sometimes you don't even "look" like you are saved. God says whether or not you look like it or feel like it, **YOU CAN KNOW BEYOND THE SHADOW OF DOUBT** that you are saved!

.....
According to 1 John 5:13, I can know "beyond the _____" that I have eternal life.
.....

Fears and doubts come from the devil – he endeavors to keep you questioning your salvation so he can keep you defeated as a Christian. He knows that the doubting Christian will never be a powerful Christian.

The Apostle Paul, one who had lived a very sinful life, even killing people, could say once he gave his life to Jesus Christ, *"...nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."* (2 Timothy 1:12) Paul had no doubts about his salvation, and God does not want us to doubt it, either.

A pastor asked a young boy if the devil ever told him he was not a Christian, "Yes," said the child, "he sometimes tells me that."

"Well, what do you say," asked the pastor.

"I tell him whether I'm a Christian or not is none of his business!" You know, that is exactly the truth. Don't let the devil talk you out of your assurance!

2. God has made it possible for Christians to have assurance of their salvation. God has given us "birthmarks" of being born-again. Just as babies have birthmarks, when we give our lives to Jesus Christ, He gives us some birthmarks as well.

Birthmark #1: Love For God.

The distinguishing mark of a person who has truly been saved and born-again is that he or she will love God with all their heart. This is the "Love" test.

Peter describes how we respond to salvation when he wrote in 1 Peter 1:8, *"You love Him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see Him, you trust Him."* (NLT) It is easy to grow into loving those that we get to

know through daily contact, but when we are born-again we begin loving Someone we will not see this side of eternity.

We love Jesus because He first loved us and gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Paul expressed his love for Christ in Philippians 3:8: *"Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ and to know that I belong to Him."* (CEV)

The heart and soul of the Christian life is our love for Christ. He becomes more precious to us than anyone or anything else. Matthew 13 describes this in two ways. Jesus says that salvation is like someone who sold everything he owned for a field with treasure buried in it and, it is like a seller of pearls who found one pearl of great price and sold everything he owned to buy that one pearl. That is how a Christian responds to God's Love, Grace and Forgiveness. They let go of everything else and grab hold of Jesus.

When God took the blinders off of your spiritual eyes and helped you see how dirty and hopeless your life was without Christ, you begin to realize that nothing you once held dear is worth keeping if it means losing Christ. Jesus Christ is far more valuable than anything you ever had. All possessions, fame, and desires have become worthless compared to Christ. Your new desire is to:

- Know Him,
- Honor Him,
- Serve Him,
- Obey Him, and
- Be Like Him.

Those are the fruits of your new relationship with Jesus Christ, Lord of the universe. God has given you a new life

centered on Christ that changes everything else. Our love for God is the supreme birthmark that gives us confidence that we are children of God.

.....

LOVE TEST:

What are some of the things that you used to LOVE that you found to be worthless compared to knowing Christ?

.....

Birthmark #2: Live for God.

The second birthmark that a new believer has is that they WANT to live for God. This does not mean that they will always live for Him, but they WANT to. This is the "Lord" birthmark. Is Jesus truly your Lord? This means that He is your boss – the CEO of your life. Before you came to Christ, you were the boss. Now, Jesus is the Boss.

Do you desire to live by God's Word? This is a good sign that you are truly a child of God.

1 John 2:3 says, "How can we be sure that we know God in the right way - keep His commandments." (MSG)

Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

What grows out of that heart of love is a life devoted to Him. Christ comes in and changes our hearts, we fall desperately

in love with Him, and we want to express that love in our devotion to follow Him wherever He tells us to go.

LORD TEST:

Do you want to live for God?

Did you mean it when you gave Him your life? Are there areas of your life that you want to give to Him right now?

Lesson 3
LET OTHERS KNOW
Making it Known that Christ is Your Lord

Matthew 10:32-33, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

Here, Jesus is talking about going public with our new devotion to Christ. We can ask Christ to save us and be our Lord and Master in private, but Jesus demands that we make it public. This means that those who know us the best should see through our daily life the change that has taken place inside of us.

.....

List three people that need to know that you have chosen to follow Christ:

.....

Next, this also means that we should go before the Church to publicly acknowledge that we have given our lives to Christ. *Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."* This actually goes hand in hand with the first way of letting others know. We can obey both of these commands by first going before the Church and publicly saying, "I have asked Jesus to come into my life and I have committed my life to Him." Next, you can tell the Pastor that you want to be water baptized. This is not to

embarrass you – this is to make your faith and devotion to Christ public – like Jesus commands.

.....

List the Church that you would feel most comfortable doing this at: _____

.....

What Is Water Baptism?

Water baptism is one of the most important, meaningful, and beautiful experiences in the Christian life. Just before Jesus began his 3 and ½ year ministry on the earth, He submitted to being water baptized. After He concluded his ministry on the earth, He commanded baptism in Matthew 28. So, let's take a look at why water baptism was so important to Jesus and why it should also be important to you.

The word "baptize" literally means "to immerse." Baptism is so important because it is a picture of what Jesus did for us when He was crucified, buried in a tomb and raised from the dead. When we do it, we are symbolizing that and saying, "I want to be a part of that."

Romans 6:4 tells us "therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

When you go under the water, you are placed in a liquid tomb – just like Christ was in a tomb. We are buried with Christ by baptism. When we come out of the water - that pictures a resurrection. We are raised up to live new lives through Christ.

What is the gospel? *“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15:3-4)*. That’s the gospel! And that’s what water baptism pictures. We are picturing and identifying with Christ and His saving gospel, saying to everyone who sees – **“Look Christ has saved me. The old has gone and the new has come!”**

It is just like when I got married – I didn’t HAVE to wear a wedding ring on my finger, I WANTED TO! I wear this wedding ring on my finger to symbolize the commitments I made to my wife on our wedding day. It is only a symbol of our love and devotion to each other so the world will see and know.

That is exactly what Christ wants you to do by being water baptized. You don’t have to – YOU WANT TO! Don’t wait – show the love inside of your heart and devotion to Christ by going to the Pastor and asking to be water baptized.

.....

Questions:

What does the word “baptism” actually mean?

What does water baptism symbolize?

Will you get baptized as soon as possible?

.....

Lesson 4

GETTING INTO GOD'S WORD

Get Stronger By Reading the Bible

There are few things that will help you stay strong in your walk with the Lord other than getting into God's Word. *Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is "living and active."* There are five things that getting into God's Word will do for you.

God's Word Will Help You:

1. Be Strong In The Lord

1 Peter 2:2 says "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby." Show me a person who is truly a strong, growing Christian and I will show you a person who spends a lot of time in God's Word. Natural food brings natural strength! Spiritual food brings spiritual strength as well.

Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Just like your physical body needs physical food, your spiritual life needs spiritual food. Once your body is dead and buried, your spirit will continue to live on throughout eternity, either in heaven or hell. Your spirit is the real you and needs food.

Job 23:12 says "I have not departed from the command of His lips. I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." Believers need to understand that is far more important to feed the real you, than your physical body, and the proper food for the real you is God's

Word. Just like you can be really weak if you haven't had something to eat in a long time, your faith can also be really weak if you do not feed on God's Word.

God's Word Will Help You

2. Know Right From Wrong

The second thing that reading God's Word, the Bible, will do for you is that it will teach you how to decide if something is right or wrong.

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally, 'God-breathed'], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Our culture is confused as to what is really right and wrong. They don't want to accept the advice of God's Word. If God's Word tells me something is wrong for me to do and by doing it, I will endanger myself, then it would be smart for me to listen. Reading God's Word, the Bible, will help us to discern between what is right for us and what is wrong.

God's Word Will Help You

3. Know God Better

The third thing that reading God's Word will do for us is that it will help us see what God is really like. Every one of us wants to know who our Creator God really is and what He is like. We want to know how we can please Him and what would make Him angry. Well, reading God's Word will show us these things. The Old Testament is full of stories of great men and women who lived a long time ago and how they

pleased God with their lives. There are also stories of men and women who made God angry because of their sin.

When you get into God's Word, you will begin to see what God likes and what He does not like.

Proverbs 6:16-19 says, "These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren." Proverbs 15:8 says "the prayer of the upright is His delight." Proverbs 15:9 says "He loves him who follows righteousness."

My question is how would you know these things that God loves or hates? How would you know who God really is? Are you just letting TV define who God is for you? Are you just letting preachers, parents and friends tell you what God likes or dislikes? The only source for real Truth is God's Word. The only real way to find out these things is to get into God's Word.

God's Word Will Help You

4. Have Strength When You're Tempted

The fourth thing that reading God's Word will do for us if we get into it is that it will provide strength when you are tempted.

Matthew 4:1-4 says, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said,

“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

What you should notice is that the way Jesus got out of this temptation was by saying what the Scriptures, or the Bible, had to say. Satan tempted him two other times and each time, Jesus quoted verses from the Old Testament in response. See, God’s Word brings strength. *Psalm 119:11 says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”* Sin looks tempting until you weigh it against the consequences. Satan never tells you the whole story when he tries to tempt you to sin. When you feel like you can’t say no to those temptations, look to God’s Word to get the whole story.

Proverbs chapter one says, “My child, if sinners entice you, turn your back on them!... Don’t go along with them, my child! Stay far away from their paths... When a bird sees a trap being set, it stays away. But not these people! They set an ambush for themselves; they booby-trap their own lives! (v. 10, 15, 17, 18, NLT).”

Well, the point is, during the heat of the moment, remembering these words will help you to say no. You know you WANT to say no, but the STRENGTH to say no only comes from getting into God’s Word.

God’s Word Will Help You

5. Separate From The World

Lastly, Reading God’s Word sets us apart from the world. It is really easy to begin seeking what the world seeks: fun,

fame, and fortune. But that lifestyle always ends with you still feeling empty.

The only way to live truly satisfied is to live for God. Jesus prayed for His disciples in *John 17:16-17*, saying *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them [that is, set them apart from the world] through Thy Truth: Thy Word is Truth.”*

If you really want to please God with your life, you will have to live a separated life. The only way to live a separated life, set apart from the world’s influence, is through the strength brought to you by getting into God’s Word.

.....

Review:

God’s Word Will Help You:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
-
-

Lesson 5

GETTING INTO GOD'S WORD PT. 2

How To Get The Most Out Of Your Bible

You will see as you continue in your journey with Christ, either two things will happen:

1. You will give the *Word of God* first place in your life and it will slowly make you look more and more like Jesus Christ; or
2. You will allow this *World* – that is, it's values, priorities and pleasures – to have first place in your life and it will slowly make you look more and more like people who have never given their lives to Christ.

Romans 12:2 tells us, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." *The NLT* reads, "...let God transform you into a new person..." How do we allow God to transform us into a new person? How do we continue to look more and more like Jesus Christ? By staying in His Word, the Bible. Remember this: The Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't. God and His Word will never disagree. The Bible is actually God speaking to you and me. When you put the Word first place in your life, you ARE putting Jesus first place in your life. When you fall in love with the Word of God, you will soon fall in love with Jesus Himself! Here are some ways to begin today getting into God's Word.

Get Into God's Word By:

1. Devotional Bible Reading

First, Devotional Bible Reading is simply reading the Bible as a way to hear from God in a personal way. Reading God's Word is the primary way that the Lord will speak to you personally. There have been many times that the Lord has spoken to His followers through the regular, daily reading of Scripture. Having already seen many of the benefits from getting into God's Word, every believer should make Bible reading a daily habit. Systematically working your way through the Bible must be a priority, or it will never be done.

1 Timothy 4:7b says, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." (NASB) Just as physical growth and development will never occur apart from a systematic plan, your spiritual growth and development will not either. Where do you begin? Most people should begin by reading a New Testament book, like the Gospel of John. There are 21 chapters in this book, and you can work your way through it by reading one chapter every day. Set a time and place each day that you will read that chapter. Maybe the best time for you is when you eat breakfast. Maybe the best time is right before you go to bed. Just be consistent.

Each day, when you sit down to read your chapter, first, take thirty seconds or a minute and try to close out everything else. Then ask God to speak to you through His Word. Read the chapter and allow God to speak to you. The Bible is God talking to you personally. Read it like that. When something you read stands out to you, why don't you write that down on an index card and take it with you all day, thinking about it. This is allowing God to talk to you through that Word, and it will feed you.

.....
Each day, I will endeavor to read God's Word:

Time of Day? _____

Place? _____
.....

Get Into God's Word By: 2. Bible Memorization

Secondly, Bible Memorization is simply storing God's Word in your heart and mind. *Psalm 119:11 says, "I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (ESV)*

Memorizing Scripture will give you strength during temptation – that's what this verse is promising. Jesus was able to stand strong during temptation because of the Scripture He had stored up in his mind and heart.

Though many people will say that they do not have a good memory, they would change their tune if they received a hundred dollars for every verse memorized. The bottom line is that we remember what is important to us. Anyone who loves a particular sports team will remember specifics about that team. A truck driver will remember the best places to get gas. A housewife will remember a supermarket's specials. We remember best what is most important to us.

If the Bible is important, then we will develop a systematic way to memorize Scripture, one verse at a time. Your memory is like a muscle, the more you use it the stronger it will become.

Maybe you have found a verse in this little book that you would like to memorize. Begin there. Maybe you will see a

verse during your devotional Bible reading that you want to memorize. Begin there. Use whatever system you want, but begin today, and don't quit until you leave this earth.

Give the Word of God opportunity to transform your life: memorize it.

What one verse in this book will you try to memorize this week? _____

Get Into God's Word By: 3. Bible Meditation

Lastly, Bible Meditation is simply focusing your thinking on a specific passage until the Holy Spirit speaks to you directly from that passage. This is what Jesus wanted His disciples to do when He said, *"If you abide in Me and MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU..." (John 15:7)* The great thing about memorizing Scripture first is you can do this anytime and anywhere – whether you have a Bible on you or not!

Ezekiel 3:10 says, "Then he added, 'Son of man, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first. Listen to them carefully for yourself.'" (NLT)

God wants our hearts to be storehouses for His Word. Our hearts are sponges and will fill up with whatever we saturate ourselves in the most. When we are completely saturated with a portion of God's Word, it will come out in any way possible – in our conversations with coworkers, fellow students, family members and more.

God's Word will have penetrated our soul until it comes out of our mouths. When we find that we are not speaking God's Word on a regular basis, in prayer or in conversation, we should immediately realize that we have not been saturating our souls in meditation of God's Word.

I recently read of a Christian young man whose band performed on a Caribbean cruise. One night his buddies tried to entice him into the ship's bar, but Chad, whose mother was an alcoholic, had memorized verses from Proverbs about alcohol abuse.

He explained to his friends that addiction ran in his family, then he had the courage to quote Scripture to them: *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."* (Proverbs 20:1)

They replied, "Come on, Chad. Just one beer won't hurt." He replied, *"At the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper"* (Proverbs 23:32).

They accused him of rejecting their company, to which he said, *"If sinners entice you, do not consent."* (Proverbs 1:10)

"Leave him be," he heard one of the young men say to the others. *"He's so full of Scripture we can't do a thing with him!"*

The result of meditation is that we become what we think about – *Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he..."* When we continue to store God's Word in our heart and in our mind, we will notice that our thoughts will begin to line up with God's thoughts.

Romans 12:2 says, "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." That is how God changes you. It takes a

lot of time, but it is worth the effort. Just as a baby begins to grab for their bottle, so you and I should grab continually for God's bottle – His Word. It will feed you so you can be a strong, growing Christian. Our lives will be changed when we make God's Word a priority.

Review:

Three Ways We Get Into God's Word:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

Lesson 6
TALKING TO GOD PT. 1
What Prayer Will Do For You

When you and I pray, we are showing that we need God. When you and I do not pray, we are saying we do not need Him in our lives. God is never more first place in our lives than when we are getting to know Him better through His Word and when we are depending upon Him through prayer.

Prayer is simply talking to God. It is not some real mysterious thing. God wants you to talk with Him. God wanted to talk to you, so He took the time to give us His Word. God wants you to talk to Him, so He has created a way whereby we could communicate with Him.

.....

When you and I _____,
we are showing that we _____ God.

.....

Since the creation of mankind, God has communicated with people. He spoke to Adam in the Garden of Eden on a daily basis. In the same way, God desires to communicate with us. *First Corinthians 14:5* says, "I want all of you to develop intimacies with God in prayer." (MSG) Prayer is the way we are to become intimate with God. We were created to communicate with God.

What Will Prayer Do For Me?

Well, first of all, I believe it's important to talk for a minute about what prayer will do for you, I mean, why pray? There

are three things that happen for me when I spend time with God and talk to Him about stuff.

Prayer Will Help Me: 1. Focus On God

The first thing that happens when you pray is your focus begins to shift from yourself to God. We are living in a very self-centered world and it is so easy to get caught up only thinking of ourselves. But, when we pray, we stop thinking about ourselves. When I'm praying for Suzie's salvation or Bob's protection, I am concerning myself with their world. I am no longer only concerned about my own problems.

Matthew 6:6 says, "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."

Talking to God, realizing that He is God and He made you, really humbles you and helps you to get a reality check. You are not the center of the Universe, God is.

Prayer Will Help Me: 2. Depend On God's Power

The second thing prayer will do for you is you will get God's power on the scene. Prayer actually invites God's power to be worked in our lives. *James 5:16, "...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* You know, when you are living out your salvation, there will be times when you do not have spiritual power. These are the times that we, invariably, give in to temptations and peer pressure.

God designed a sure-fire way to help you stay strong in times of temptation – it's your consistent time with God.

If you show me a consistently strong Christian who is showing his faith by his lifestyle consistently, I will show you a person who is spending time with God regularly. It's just a fact of this Christian life. God wants you to talk to Him so that He can give the strength you need to live victoriously.

Jesus spoke to His disciples in *Matthew 26:41* says "*Watch [that means "stay alert"] and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" You can also get strength through prayer when you are being pressured by people. When they are giving you a hard time at school, work or anywhere else, you can pray and be strengthened. Jesus told His disciples in *Matthew 5:44* says, "*...pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*"

There have been many times in my life where people have not treated me good, but because I had been in prayer earlier in the day, their attitudes had no effect on me. Prayer gives you strength. If you show me a Christian who is consistently struggling staying on track with God, I will show you a Christian who has not depended enough on God's strength through prayer.

.....

I will only be a strong Christian when I spend time
with God _____.

.....

Prayer Will Help: 3. Keep Me From Worry

The third thing that talking to God regularly will do is it will keep you from worrying about your problems. Jesus made it plain when He told us in *Matthew 6:25 and 27*, “...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing...which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”

Well, some of us worry about everything from safety to where our next tank of gas will come from. God does not want us to worry. He wants us to pray. *Philippians 4:6-7* says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

See, praying to God, thanking Him for what He already has done for us up until now keeps us from worrying. Instead, we can have peace dominating our minds. Remember, whenever you talk to God, He replaces your fears with peace. I don't know how He does it, but He does! Prayer is powerful!

.....
Review:

Three Ways Prayer Will Help Me:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

Lesson 7

TALKING TO GOD PT. 2

Prayer in the Life of Jesus

We have a wonderful example of how to depend on God and how to talk to God in the life of Jesus Christ. *Luke 5:16 says, "But Jesus OFTEN withdrew to the wilderness for prayer."*

Jesus Made Time For Prayer

For everyone who wants to say they do not have time to pray, I would like to show them Jesus. If we were to judge Him by today's standards, He would be considered a workaholic, but yet He found time to pray.

The Bible records the busiest day of Jesus' life, one where He is exhaustingly ministering to the needs of people – healing the sick, teaching in the synagogues and casting out demons late into the night.

You would think that maybe Jesus would sleep in the next morning, like most of us would, but Mark 1:35 tells us that *"long before daybreak [Jesus] went out alone into the wilderness to pray."*

He got up early in the morning to talk with God before the busyness and responsibilities of the next day. He probably thought, "More people are going to need help. I'll talk to God before any of them are awake!" You may have to do this, too.

Many of us live very busy lives, but if we're really honest with ourselves, there is time that we waste. According to USA Today, in the average American's lifetime, he or she will spend:

- 6 months at stoplights
- 8 months opening junk mail
- 1 yr looking for misplaced objects
- 2 yrs unsuccessfully returning phone calls
- 5 yrs waiting in line, and
- 6 yrs eating!

The truth is, we all have time to pray, but we don't always make time. *Ephesians 5:16 says, "Make the most of every opportunity."* It seems like we can come up with a million things to do when we sit down to pray. It is because the devil knows how to convince you not to pray. All he has to do is whisper in your ear about that project you haven't started on yet, or your chores, or those friends you said you'd call back or WHATEVER!

One man said, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our hard work, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray!"

So, the next time you sit down to pray and your mind begins to race through all your responsibilities, just write them down on a "to-do" list that you can take care of AFTER you spend time with your Creator!

Jesus Prayed Before Making Big Decisions

What else can we learn from Jesus' prayer life? The Bible tells of how Jesus went about making important decisions. *Luke 6:12-13* says, "...Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and He prayed to God all night. At daybreak He called together all of his disciples and chose 12 of them to be apostles..."

Jesus had many followers when He began His ministry. He wanted to select 12 to be his close companions. He knew that once He would die and be raised from the dead, these disciples would go out and preach the Gospel to the entire known world. It was one of the most important decisions He would have to make, and He dare not make it alone. He spent all night in prayer to God. He depended on God to help Him make the tough decisions in life.

We can also depend on God to help us when we must make important decisions – like where to go for college, who to date, who to marry or where to find a good job.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Without the assistance of the Divine Being, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail."

Prayer happens when we decide to depend on God. When we depend on our own strength and ability, we will not pray! You can't say, "I'm depending on God," if you have not prayed. They go together. Jesus depended on God to help Him make good decisions by talking to Him all through the night. God wants to help us with the tough decisions, and He will if we will spend time with Him.

.....
Review:

1. Jesus made _____ for prayer.
 2. The devil _____ at our hard work, _____ at our wisdom, but _____ when we pray.
-
-

Lesson 8

TALKING TO GOD PT. 3

How Do I Pray?

Well, now that we've seen clearly why we should pray and that even Jesus needed to pray, let's answer the greatest question of all: "How Do I Pray?" *Matthew 6:9 says, "This is your Father you are dealing with and He knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply..."(MSG)* Even though we shouldn't try to make prayer a mechanical thing that is so picked apart to where it is no longer real and honest, there are some basic rules that God wants us to know when we approach Him in prayer.

The first thing that we need to know is that Jesus said in *John 14:6, "I am THE way, THE truth, and THE life: No one comes to the Father except through Me."* We need to realize that the only way we are even able to talk to God is because Jesus came and shed His blood so that we could have a love relationship with God.

Jesus said to His disciples in *John 16:23-24, "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."* Another helpful verse of Scripture on prayer is *1 John 5:14-15, which says, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."* From these two passages, we have a list of three rules to abide by when praying:

1. Pray to the Father
2. Pray in the name of Jesus
3. Pray according to God's Will

We are not told to pray to Mary or to one of the saints. Jesus said to talk to the Father, in His name and according to God's will. Your prayer could begin something like this: "Father, I come to You in the name of Jesus..." The other aspect that Jesus tells us is to ask the Father for things that are according to what God wants. We will only be able to know if it's God's will if we read and study regularly His Word. God's Word is His Will for us.

For example, it would be wrong for you to pray that God would give you that married person to take as your own spouse!! God clearly says that He hates divorce – God clearly says that He hates divorce – *Malachi 2:16: "For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce..."* Therefore, that prayer would not be "according to God's will." It's right for you to ask God for a good spouse that loves God, but you can't ask God for things that He hates. He certainly won't answer those requests. Learn to pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus and according to God's will.

.....

List the three rules of prayer:

1. Pray _____.
2. Pray _____.
3. Pray _____.

Write out a verse on prayer you will try to memorize:

.....

Lesson 9
TALKING TO GOD PT. 4
A Pattern to PRAY

When you talk to God, what are some of the areas that you can talk to Him about? Well, all you have to remember is the word "PRAY." We use this word "PRAY" to help us remember the four areas to talk to God about when we PRAY:

- P – Praise God
- R – Repent of My Sin
- A – Ask God's Help
- Y – Yield My Life

Praise

First, you should begin talking to Him by thanking and praising Him for Who He is and what He's done in your life. To "Praise" God means to express to God what He means to you. When you first sit down or get on your knees to talk to God, you should first spend some time telling God just how awesome He is. You're not doing this so that God will get prideful, but rather so you can remember how awesome He is.

There's something about saying out loud how we feel about a person that stirs our emotions up all over again. I love my wife, but when I tell her how awesome she is to me, I love her even more because I remember just how cool she really is. This is what you are doing with God. You can say something like this: *"Father God, I come to You in the name of Jesus and I just want to thank You for being my*

Creator. You're the One Who made the stars and the sky. You made this grass and You made the plants..."

One way you could adore God is to pray the Psalms to Him. Psalm 100 is a great one to use. It reads, *"Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations."*

You can use this and say it to God. That is what praising God looks like. Always spend some time praising God for who He is when you begin talking to Him.

Repent

Acts 3:19 says, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." 1 John 1:9 says, "But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."

After you spend time telling God how awesome He is, you will begin to feel just how human you are, sin and all. All of us sin, and in order to get forgiveness for it, we have to tell God about that sin – that's confession; and we have to turn from that sin back to God – that's repentance.

Repentance just means we are telling God that we understand that what we did was wrong in God's sight, and we don't want to live that way anymore. We could pray

something like this, *“Father God, I’m asking You to forgive me for disobeying my parents when they told me to take out the trash and I didn’t do it. It was wrong. Thank You for forgiving me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Since we are human, and we all sin, you should endeavor to repent – turning from your sins and turning back to God – while you are talking to Him. Get in the habit of running to God when you sin, not from Him. He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for your sins. He sent Jesus so that sin would not get in the way of a love relationship between you and Him. Don’t run from God when you sin – RUN TO HIM.

I love the bumper sticker that says, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven!” The only way we can get forgiven is to tell God about it and turn from it – that’s repentance.

Ask

This is the one we understand the best. God wants us to ask Him for His help. It shows our dependence upon Him. We should ask God to take care of our needs and our wants because we know that He is the One who loves us and takes care of us. We should ask God for help, like in studying for the test or giving us more boldness in our witness at school.

Remember to not only talk to God about your needs but also the needs of other people, too. Your prayer could go something like this: *“Father, You know I have an F in chemistry. I hate chemistry, but I know I need to pass this class. Lord, help me study for the next test, so I can pull up my grades. I need Your help. Thank You for helping me study, In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

Yield

Lastly, never leave your place of prayer without yielding your life again to God. Some people call this rededication, and some people only do this when they feel far from God. You and I should do this every morning or every evening, whenever we spend time talking to God. Jesus had to do this when He prayed in *Luke 22:42* ***“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”***

Here, you get an excellent example of a prayer of bowing before God. Yield yourself to God’s will again. Yield yourself to being a witness to your friends and neighbors again. Yield yourself to being a godly man or woman again. You can pray something like this, ***“Father, I know that it is hard sometimes for me to stand for You at work and at school, but help me do this. I want to lay down my plans for today and tell You that I’ll do anything that You want me to do today. Thank You for being with me, and living through me, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.”***

Remember that God wants to talk to you and He wants to hear from you. When we talk to God, we should be honest telling Him everything. Don’t only talk to Him when you go to Church. Talk to Him when you wake up in the morning. If you will regularly meet with God on a daily basis, you will begin to experience His strength, guidance, comfort and peace. No one can explain how much stronger you feel as a Christian when you talk to God regularly. You just have to experience it for yourself. Set aside some time each day to meet with your Creator. He yearns for it and He’s waiting for you.

.....
P - _____

R - _____

A - _____

Y - _____
.....

Lesson 10
YOU'RE IN THE FAMILY PT. 1
You Are Part Of God's Family

You know, Jesus personally established the church while He was on the earth to unite Christians as a spiritual family. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus tells Peter, *"I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."*

If there is one thing that Jesus loves, it's the Church! Whenever I hear people say that they love Jesus but they don't care for the Church, I question if they are really a child of God, born again! How could you have committed your life to Christ, yet never commit yourself to who Jesus came and died for – His Church?! If you love Jesus, you will love what He loves, and He loves the Church!

The Family of God

Did you know that when you were born again that God placed you into His family? That family is called the Church. The word Church actually means "called out ones." The Church is made up of people who have been called out to follow Jesus. When you got saved, you entered into God's family.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "Long ago, even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to ADOPT US INTO HIS OWN FAMILY by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure." (TLB) God is now your Father. You are now His child. God wanted a family and He chose you and I to be in that family.

Why Does A Family Exist?

Now, a family exists for the purpose of nurturing and caring for the needs of its members. A family exists for the pleasure of the other ones in that family. We are there to nurture and help them. A family helps us to see that our lives are not to be wrapped up in ourselves that we are not to be selfish. A family stretches us and makes us stronger.

Many times my wife will ask me to take time out of my schedule to help her. Many times I will ask her to take time out of her schedule to help me. This is what families are for. God placed us in natural families so we would have a support system built around our lives.

Our families and homes should be a haven from the attacks of this world. Though it's rarely true today, our young people used to know that whatever came against them at school, they could be shielded from it at home. It was a haven of safety from the world. Now we have just as much pressure and temptation in our homes as we do outside of the home. Our homes should shelter our youth from these pressures not add to them.

We look at these young people and say, "They are getting no help from their home. They are doing the best they can," and we know they will have some problems because they don't have as good of a support system surrounding them at home.

Well, in the same way every Christian needs a strong spiritual home. That's why you need to be a part of a strong local Church. You need to have a strong support system built around you to help you when you are at your weakest

moments, spiritually. You will not do well on your own apart from the family of God.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says, "Two are better than one...For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

A strong local Church can be a place where you can be encouraged and strengthened in your Christian walk. God wants you to be around other believers who can be there for you when you need them.

God placed the church here to do just that – to spiritually be a family for you. You will not do well in your spiritual walk without the support of a strong local Church and a strong Pastor.

-
1. Do you agree that you need a spiritual family to stay strong in your new life in Christ? YES / NO

 2. Where do think you might go to Church this Sunday?

.....

Lesson 11

YOU'RE IN THE FAMILY PT. 2

Why Does The Church Exist?

The Church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ who join together in fulfilling their mission to make disciples. A strong local Church will make strong Christians who follow Christ in a strong way. The Church exists for four main reasons:

1. Receive Instruction and Direction;
2. Enjoy Fellowship and Strength;
3. Worship God Together; and
4. Give and Serve Others.

Through a Local Church You:

1. Receive Instruction and Direction

In 2 Timothy 4:2-4, Paul told Timothy to "Preach the word! ... Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

The Strong Pastor Instructs

God has set up the Church to help you receive the instruction you need to grow. Sometimes each of us gets into the habit of studying what we want to know in Scripture. The way God confronts you with what you need, not just what you want, is through your local church. You need a Pastor who will hear from God every week as to what He will preach. Your Pastor has been called by God to confront you about your

sin, not excuse it away. Your Pastor will not only encourage, but also *“correct and rebuke with good teaching.”* You will only receive that kind of teaching from a strong local church.

The Strong Pastor Directs

Also, you need a Pastor that is giving direction to the flock, which is the Church. Many times in Scripture, the Pastor is called a Shepard and the people are called sheep. Sheep follow the Shepard; they don't lead the Shepard.

In the same way, you need a Pastor who will lead you. Once you have that kind of a Pastor, you need to be willing to follow the direction the Pastor is taking the Church. You need a strong local Church so you can receive instruction and direction.

God has given you the gift of a local Church so you can receive _____ and _____.

Through a Local Church You: 2. Enjoy Fellowship and Strength

If you live for Christ, committed to Him, then you WILL be persecuted. Hebrews 10:25 tells us *“You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other.”* (NCV)

When you can fellowship with those who believe like you do, you are strengthened and encouraged in your Christian walk.

Acts, chapter 4 records a time when two disciples of Jesus, Peter and John, were persecuted. They were not persecuted for doing something bad, but for doing something good!

They had prayed for a man who could not walk. God healed the man, and the people around saw it. Peter and John began sharing that Jesus healed the man, and that Jesus can also save them from their sins. Instead of the leaders of that town being happy for what Peter and John did, they beat these two and told them never to mention the name of Jesus again.

Hebrews 10:25 says, "You should not stay away from the _____ meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and _____ each other."

Though you may never get beaten for praying or sharing Christ with someone – you may be persecuted in other ways. People may laugh at your faith. They may get mad if you share your faith with their family members. They may not want to be around you anymore.

Well, Acts 4:23 and 24 tells us what Peter and John did: *"and being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord..."*

Peter and John's local church helped them by giving them strength and encouragement. You also need a strong local church to fellowship with other believers who love Jesus like you do. Then, you don't feel so much like a lone ranger.

God has put us together as a family to shoulder one another's burdens. 1 Corinthians 12:25-27 says, *"...the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one*

member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."

We all need each other. We all need people who will encourage our faith, not discourage our faith. We need a strong local church for fellowship and strength.

Through a Local Church You: 3. Worship God Together

Colossians 3:16 tells us to *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*

Although it's good to sing worshipful songs to God on our own, here God commands that we do this together as a Church. Well, you need a strong local church that sings songs to God with thankful hearts.

An atmosphere of worship can strengthen you when words alone won't do it. When you sing songs TO God, it's like you are putting a magnifying glass on God, and suddenly God is everything to you and nothing else matters. This is how life should be. Worshiping God allows you to focus on Him and tell Him how great He is. This is another reason you need a strong local Church – so you can meet to worship.

Through a Local Church You: 4. Give and Serve Others

God has given you special gifts and abilities in order to serve others and Him. Romans 12:4-5 says, *"For as we have many*

members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Another translation reads at verse 5 and 6, *“And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and EACH OF US NEEDS ALL THE OTHERS. God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well...”* (NLT)

Each one of us was designed by God to give back to others through the gifts and talents He has blessed us with. We are not supposed to be an island, by ourselves. We all need each other, just as a family needs one another.

.....

Through the Local Church You:

1. Receive _____ and _____.
 2. _____ Fellowship and _____.
 3. _____ God _____.
 4. _____ and _____ Others.
-

Lesson 12

YOU'RE IN THE FAMILY PT. 3

The Church, A Godly Influence

Now, The last thing I want you to see about why Jesus established the Church was so that it could be a godly influence on us, our families and our communities. Three young people were hanging out on a street corner one day and a Christian man came by to invite them to Church. They came and, at his insistence, agreed to come back to his Sunday School class. They became the very core of his class every week.

Years later, a group of the man's friends decided to catch up with these boys to see what had become of them. They discovered that one had become a missionary to China, the second was the private secretary of President Herbert Hoover, and the third was President Hoover himself! That is how much of a godly influence the Church can have on just three little boys.

Here's the catch. The Church can only be a godly influence on you, your families and your communities if you regularly go to it – actively involved in what is going on.

- How would you like it if your watch ticked one time and missed the next?
 - How would you like it if your heart beat one time and missed the next?
 - How would you like it if your boss gave you a paycheck one week and missed the next?
 - How would you like it if the mall opened one weekend and missed the next?
-

Do you get the point? Irregularity in any area of life causes problems.

Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." You need to make a firm commitment to actively, regularly attend a strong, local Church.

Ephesians 5:25 tells us that Christ "loved the church and gave Himself for her..." If Christ gave up His life for the Church, His Body, we should be willing to not only associate with it, but also be actively involved in the mission of the Church – bringing others to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Make This Commitment to the Lord:

I, _____, make this
commitment to the Lord today, ___ / ___ / 20 ___.

I commit to not only find a strong, Bible-believing, local church where I can grow as a Christian, but I commit to be regular in my attendance, treating it as a gift from God to me. Thank You, Lord for helping me find the Church I should get involved in, and thank You for helping me stay consistent.

(your signature and date)

Lesson 13
YOU'RE IN THE FAMILY PT. 4
What to Look for in a Church

Alright, we've established that you need a strong, local Church to be connected with. Now, let's answer the question, "How do I find a strong, local Church?" What do you look for when you are searching for a Church to be connected with?

Look for a Church that:
1. Holds the Bible Highly

You need to find a Church where the Word of God is held in high esteem. Don't go somewhere where they rarely use the Bible, or don't use it at all! The Bible is God speaking to you, and the Church you get established in needs to hold it highly and dearly.

When you find a Church where the Bible is preached, you should attend for one or two months to get a good feel of what the Church is all about. You will not get an accurate perspective if you just go one Sunday morning and that's it. Give it some time. During this month or two, you should be looking for:

-
- What does the Pastor preach?
 - Are you fed spiritually when he preaches?
 - Are you challenged spiritually when he preaches?
 - Does he mainly use the Bible when he preaches, or does he use something else, like stories?
 - Does he preach sound doctrine that lines up with Scripture?
-

Look for a Church that:
2. Follows a Godly Pastor

Is the Church you think you will get involved in being led by a godly Pastor, or is it led by the people? Is the Church under the spiritual leadership of the Pastor? God established the Church to be led by one man, called of God.

Many times in Scripture, the Pastor is referred to as the Shepherd and the Church is referred to as the sheep. Now, the sheep don't lead themselves, do they? Of course not, they take their directions from one Shepherd and that is how God wants His church run as well.

This doesn't mean that the Pastor can't have committees or boards or ministry teams to help him in leading, but the buck stops with him, not the committees.

That pastor should have the freedom to go into any meeting within that church and say, "I believe God wants this Church to go in this direction..." having the support and backing of those committees. That is how God designed the Church to be run – orderly.

Look for a Church that:
3. Helps You Grow Spiritually

Thirdly, you should see if that church has some kind of discipleship training where you can grow spiritually. This can be mid-week meetings, Sunday School, small group bible studies, or take home discipleship classes like the book you are reading now. There should be something in place that can help further your walk with God.

Look for a Church that:
4. Offers Areas To Serve

Fourthly, does this Church offer an area where you can use your spiritual gifts in service to God? You as a Christian need to be serving God and serving His Church with your talents and abilities – those things that come easily to you. Ask yourself if they have areas you can serve in.

Look for a Church that:
5. Welcomes and Loves You

Lastly, does this Church have an atmosphere of love where people can have great times of fellowship with one another? You need to be able to fellowship with other believers. The Church you choose should have an atmosphere where you feel welcome and loved. This fellowship could come when you meet for Sunday School or when you find an area to serve in. Just remember, when you choose to connect with a strong, local Church, you are choosing a road that leads you to becoming a stronger follower of Jesus Christ. Connect with one today and continue to grow in the Lord.

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Look for a Church that:

1. Holds the _____ highly;
 2. Follows a Godly _____;
 3. Helps you _____ spiritually;
 4. Offers _____ to _____; and
 5. _____ and _____ you.
-
-

Lesson 14
CONTINUE YOUR COURSE
The Christian Life is about Direction,
not Perfection

You have hopefully grown during these lessons, and now you have come to the end. You have hopefully made some commitments concerning what you will do with prayer, church, and the Bible. The last thing, which has been mentioned earlier, you need to make sure you never forget is this statement:

.....

**The Christian Life is not about
PERFECTION, but about DIRECTION.**

.....

There will be times when you feel close to the Lord, and there will be times when you don't. There will be times when the commitments that you have made in this book come easily and there will be times when they are hard. There will be times when you want to read your Bible, pray and go to Church, and there will be times when you don't.

There will also be times when you will stand strong against the temptations of this world, and there will be times when you fall into sin. What are you going to do?

When Jesus had been taken by His enemies, just before He was crucified – all of His disciples ran away. His disciples saw how they treated Jesus, and they did not want to be treated in the same way. Peter even denied he even knew Jesus three times. Once he even swore he did not know Jesus. Peter later regretted what he had done. Peter wished he was more courageous. Peter actually thought Jesus would

never forgive him. Three days later, when Jesus rose from the dead, He made sure Peter knew that He was forgiven, by appearing to Him personally (see Luke 24:34).

John chapter 21 describes how the disciples were coming back from fishing when they saw Jesus at the coast. When Peter saw it was Jesus, he did not wait to get the boat to the shore. He just jumped in the water and swam to meet him. What can we learn from these events in the life of Peter? This lesson: ***When you sin, don't run from God – RUN TO HIM.***

Because the Christian life is about direction, not perfection, you need to run back to God when you fall into sin. Not one person ever walked this earth without sinning – nobody's perfect. That's why Jesus died for our sins.

**When You Sin,
Don't Run FROM God – Run TO Him.**

Pick yourself up and run back to Him. ***Proverbs 24:16 says, "Though a righteous man falls seven times, he will get up..." (HCSB)*** You see, even if you deny Jesus in front of your friends or family, like Peter – you can get back up, brush yourself off and run back to Him. Jesus died so that sin would not have to stand in the way of your relationship with God.

Sin will never cause you to lose your salvation. Your relationship with God will never be lost. God will forever be your Father. You will forever be His child. However, sin WILL cause you to break fellowship with God. Just like when you yell at your parents, you will not cease to be their children (that's relationship), but you will lose your fellowship with them until you get it straightened out.

So what does God require for you to be back in good fellowship with Him? *1 John 1:9* says, *"If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* "Confessing sin" involves three things: 1) It means owning up to what we have done; 2) It means asking God to forgive us; and 3) It means turning from that sin, and standing strong against it next time. These are the things that will allow us to get back up and get back into good fellowship with God again.

.....

"Confessing Sin" means:

1. Owning up to _____.
 2. _____ God to _____ you.
 3. _____ from that sin, standing _____ against it next time.
-

God knows you will sin – that's why He sent Jesus. But God does not allow you to stay in your sin. God is ready and willing to help you back up, but you must own up to it, ask God to forgive you and turn from it. God loves you. When you sin, don't run from God, run to Him. The Christian life is about direction, not perfection. Continue your course and stay strong in your new relationship with God.
