

new believer's
B I B L E

new testament

first steps for new christians

GREG LAURIE, GENERAL EDITOR



**New Living
Translation®**

SECOND EDITION

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presented to

by

on the occasion of

date

The grass withers
and the flowers fade,
but the word of our
God stands forever.

ISAIAH 40:8

Contributors

Greg Laurie, General Editor
Karen Dagher, Harvest Ministries Editor
Danny Bond, Harvest Ministries Assistant Editor
Steve Benson, Tyndale House Editor
Ron Kaufmann and Timothy R. Botts, Graphic Designers

Greg Laurie is not only an evangelist, author, and pastor but is the president of Harvest Ministries as well. Harvest Ministries sponsors Harvest Crusades. These crusades are public evangelistic events intended to present the message of Jesus Christ to people in a nonreligious environment. Begun in 1990, Harvest Crusades are known for their informal atmosphere, contemporary music, and simple, straightforward messages by Greg Laurie. If you would like more information on Harvest Ministries and/or their crusades, write to Harvest Ministries, P.O. Box 4000, Riverside, CA 92514-4000. Or call (951) 687-6595. On the Internet, type <http://www.harvest.org>.

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Congratulations! You are holding in your hands the best-selling book in the history of humanity—the Bible. It was given to us by God thousands of years ago. Although the Bible has been around for some time, the wisdom and knowledge contained within are still relevant today. In fact, everything you need to know about God and life is found in the pages of this book. It is the “user’s manual of life” that we all have been searching for.

The Bible does not just teach us about life, though. It also shows us how to come into a *personal* relationship with the very God who inspired this book. This particular Bible contains features that have been specially designed to help you understand, discover, and deepen the personal relationship that God wants to have with you.

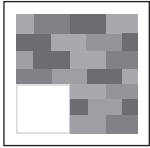
Perhaps you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, but you want to know more about Christianity. You may even want to be a believer, but you just don’t know how to become one. In the *New Believer’s Bible New Testament*, you will find a section titled “How You Can Know God” (page A11). Here, you will learn how to establish a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Maybe you have just started in the Christian faith. You are a new believer. Here you will find out how to lay a good foundation for your faith and walk with God in the years ahead.

You may even be a believer who is mature in the faith. Here you will be refreshed and reminded of the essentials of the Christian faith and life.

THE MAIN FEATURES

The *New Believer’s Bible New Testament* contains four reading tracks: Cornerstones, First Steps, Off and Running, and Big Questions. Each reading track (except Big Questions) is composed of two kinds of notes: *up-front* and *in-text*. The up-front notes appear before the Bible text and are made up of one to two paragraphs and two to eight numbered points that refer you to Scripture passages and their accompanying in-text notes. (Big Questions is composed of an up-front list of questions and the page numbers you can find them on and the in-text notes that answer those questions.)



Reading Track One: Cornerstones: Cornerstones—blocks of stone—were traditionally used to start a building's foundation. Likewise, the Cornerstones reading track helps you to begin to lay a solid foundation for your faith.

Here you will learn about God's character, Jesus' life, and the Holy Spirit's role in the lives of believers. Cornerstones also contains notes on the essential Christian character traits that are developed and nurtured by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of those traits are love, forgiveness, purity, honesty, wisdom, peace, and joy.



Reading Track Two: First Steps: The phrase *first steps* brings to mind the image of a young child taking his or her first unassisted steps. Like this young child, new believers in Christ need to learn how to walk all over again, so to speak. That is because the Christian life for

most people is a completely new way of living. To help you learn to live this new life, the First Steps reading track gives you valuable building blocks for growing in your faith. Here you will discover the importance and "how to" of studying the Bible, praying, finding the right church, resisting temptation, and seeking God's will for your life.



Reading Track Three: Off and Running: "How does God's Word apply to my everyday life?" This is one of the most widely asked questions about the Bible today. The Off and Running reading track answers this question.

Here you will discover how to put your faith into action.

You will see what the Bible has to say about important topics like marriage, parenting, priorities, conversation, and job performance. By helping you apply biblical principles to these aspects of your life, Off and Running takes you to the next level of the Christian life—living it day to day.



Reading Track Four: Big Questions: Life often presents us with difficult situations that cause us to ask hard questions. For instance, you may wonder how a good God could let something bad—like cancer—happen to you. Or you may wonder why Jesus Christ is the only way

to God. Aren't other religions just as good? In the Big Questions reading track, you will find out what the Bible has to say about tough issues. Everything from alternative lifestyles to the second coming of Christ is covered here.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

At the back of the *New Believer's Bible New Testament*, you will find several features that will help you understand the Bible and your faith better. These features are:

- *How to Study the Bible*—a practical way for you to read through the New Testament of the Bible and a list of questions to ask yourself as you read.
- *23 Great Bible Stories*—a list of well-known Bible stories from the New Testament, where you can find them, and the main lesson you can get out of them.
- *Memory Verses*—a list of key Bible verses from the New Testament to commit to memory.
- *Prophecies about Jesus*—a list of Old Testament passages that contain prophecies about Jesus and the New Testament references that record his fulfillment of those prophecies.
- *Glossary of Christian Terms*—a quick-reference guide to help you understand the meanings of words like *atonement*, *justification*, *redemption*, and *sanctification*.

HOW TO USE THE READING TRACKS

The *New Believer's Bible New Testament* is easy to use. Simply turn to page A23 and begin reading the “Who Is God?” up-front note in the Cornerstones reading track. Look up the Scripture passages and in-text notes referred to at the end of the up-front note. After you have read all the Scripture passages and in-text notes for “Who Is God?” move on to the next up-front note (“Who Is Jesus?”) and begin the process over again.

You can read one up-front note and its Scripture passages and in-text notes a day. Or, if you prefer, browse through the table of contents and choose the topic(s) that interests you most for your daily reading.

Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives.” God wants his Word to permeate every area of your life—your home, your business, your play time as well as your prayer time. So open your Bible and your heart, and God will speak to you from these pages. Don't let anything keep you from spending time each day in God's Word.



what is missing in our lives?

Purpose, meaning, a reason for living—these are all things we desire and search for in life. Despite steps each one of us takes to find purpose and meaning in life, we still feel empty, unfulfilled. That is because there is a spiritual emptiness in each of our lives. We

each have a hole in our heart, a spiritual vacuum deep within our soul—a “God-shaped blank.” Possessions won’t fill this hole, nor will success. Relationships alone cannot satisfy this emptiness, and morality, in and of itself, falls miserably short of occupying this space. In fact, even religion cannot fill the void in our heart.

There is only one way to effectively fill that void. This way will not only help us to have a life that is full and rich on this earth, but—more important—will give us the absolute hope of spending eternity in the presence of God. Before we can truly appreciate this good news, though, we need to understand the bad news, which is a serious problem we all have.

the problem: sin The Bible clearly identifies our serious problem as sin. Sin is not just an act but the actual nature of our being. In other words, we are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners! We are born with a nature to do wrong. King David, an Old Testament Israelite ruler, wrote, “For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Because we are born sinners, sinning comes to all of us

naturally. That is why it is futile to think that the answer to all of life's problems comes from "within." According to the Bible, the *problem* is within! Scripture tells us, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

We are not basically good—we are basically sinful. This sinfulness spills out into everything we do. Every problem we experience in our society today can be traced back to our refusal to live God's way. Clear back to the Garden of Eden, Adam made his choice, and he suffered the consequences of it, setting the pattern that all humanity would follow. The Bible explains, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. . . . Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone" (Romans 5:12, 18).

"That's not fair!" you may protest. Why should we suffer because of what someone else has done? Yet, given the opportunity, each one of us would have done the same thing as Adam. In fact, not a single day passes that we do not face the same test that was set before Adam. God has given us the freedom to choose between two separate paths: the path that leads to life and the path that leads to death. The Bible says, "Today, I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

without a leg to stand on Someone may say, "But I live a good life. I try to be kind and considerate to others. I live by the Ten Commandments." But the truth of the matter is that the Ten Commandments, or the law, as they are called in the Bible, were not given to make us good but to show us how bad we are. The Bible tells us, "No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are" (Romans 3:20). The purpose of the law is to make us realize how sinful we are. You might say that God's law was given to "shut our mouths" and show us that we desperately need his help and forgiveness for our terminal condition as sinners.

Look at the passages below to get a better understanding of the nature and seriousness of sin.

1. We Have All Missed the Mark (see Romans 3:23, page 170). Romans 3:23 says, we have *all* sinned. For those who would claim to be the sole exception to this eternal truth, verse ten of this chapter plainly says, "No one is righteous—not even one" (Romans 3:10). Another word for *righteous* is *good*. The word *righteous* means, "One who is as he or she ought to be." When the Bible says that no one is righteous, or good, it is not so much referring to behavior but to inner character.

What exactly is “God’s glorious standard” that Romans 3:23 says we have failed to meet? God’s “glorious standard” is absolute perfection. Jesus said, “But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). In other words, anyone who is not as good as God is not acceptable to him.

One definition of *sin*, derived from the Greek word *hamartia*, is to “miss the mark.” As far as the mark of perfection goes, we miss it by a mile. Although our sinful nature makes it impossible for us to live up to God’s standard, we cannot blame sin on our nature alone. Sin is also a deliberate act.

2. Sin Is a Deliberate Act (see Ephesians 2:1-3, page 228). Another word for *sin* in Ephesians 2:1 is *transgressions* or *trespasses*. This word speaks of a lapse or deviation from truth. In contrast to simply “missing the mark,” this is a deliberate action. Because sin is a deliberate action, we cannot blame our sin on our society or our environment or our mental or physical state. Everyone has chosen to do what was wrong. If we protest this point, “we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth” (1 John 1:8).

3. The Ultimate Penalty for Sin Is Death (see Romans 6:23, page 175). According to the Bible, we have offended a Holy God. We have not done this once or twice, but so many times that we are unable to keep count. Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death. . . .” Wages are something you are paid for work rendered. In other words, you earn your wages. Because we have all repeatedly sinned, we have earned the penalty of death, which is eternal torment and punishment in a place called hell.

Amid all this talk about sin and death, there is some good news. God has given us a way to escape the penalty of our sin. He has made it possible for us to have a relationship with him and enjoy the hope of eternal life without punishment.



the solution: Jesus Christ

God understood our problem and knew that we could do nothing about it. Because God loves us, he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to bridge the chasm of sin that separates us from him.

why Jesus can bridge the gap There has never been anyone like Jesus. For starters, Jesus was not conceived in the womb of his mother through natural means. Rather, he was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a young virgin named Mary. Because of his supernatural conception, Jesus, who is wholly God, also became wholly human.

Though Jesus is God, he chose to lay aside the privileges of his deity to live on earth as a man. The Bible, describing the sacrifice Christ made in becoming a man, says that Jesus “gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). It is extremely important to note that Jesus did not cease to be God when he came to earth. He simply laid aside his divine privileges and walked the earth as a man. In doing so, he was personally able to experience the gamut of human emotions, ranging from happiness to deep sorrow. He felt what it was like to be tired, cold, and hungry.

Moreover, he came to this earth with a clear objective in mind: to bridge that gap between us and God.

When the Israelites of the Old Testament sinned, they would have the high priest go into the Temple and offer an animal sacrifice to God to atone for their sins. In a symbolic sense, this was a way of putting one’s sins on the animal, which stood in the place of the guilty person. The Bible teaches, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

The sacrificial rituals carried out by the Israelites in the Old Testament foreshadowed what Jesus would do when he came to this earth. He took the sin of the world upon himself when he hung on the cross so many years ago.

Numerous Old Testament prophecies pointed not only to his birth and life but also to his death, including the way in which he would die.

Jesus knew from the beginning that he had come expressly to die for the sins of humanity. He also knew that this sacrifice would be made on a Roman cross. He began his final journey to the cross of Calvary at a place called Caesarea Philippi, and he often spoke of his impending death with his disciples. Scripture records, “From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead” (Matthew 16:21).

He was eventually arrested on false charges after Judas Iscariot, one of his own disciples, betrayed him. But it was no accident. If humanity was going to be put in touch with God and have the barrier that separated them removed, something drastic had to be done. In essence, with one hand Jesus took hold of

a Holy God, and with the other hand he took hold of the sinful human race. As crude nails were pounded into his hands, he bridged the gap for us!

We must not forget, however, that three days after his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead! If it is true that “you can’t keep a good man down,” then it is even truer that you can’t keep the “God-man” down.



we put Jesus on the cross

The necessity of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross shows just how radical our situation was as fallen people. It’s been said that you can tell the depth of a well by how much rope is lowered. When we look at “how much rope was lowered” from heaven,

we realize how grave our situation really was.

For that reason, don’t blame the people of that day for putting Jesus on the cross. We are just as guilty as they. In reality, it was not the Roman soldiers who put him on the cross, nor was it the Jewish leaders: it was our sins that made it necessary for Jesus to volunteer for this torturous and humiliating death.

Read the verses and notes below to see exactly what Jesus did for us.

1. *The Greatest Demonstration of Love* (see Romans 5:6-8, page 173).

Jesus did not die for us while we were his friends, but while we were his enemies, opposing him by our sinfulness. Yet, in spite of all of this, God demonstrated his love for us by dying on the cross. In this verse, the apostle Paul explains that Jesus did not simply die for humanity as a whole, but that he died for us as individuals. Elsewhere, Paul writes, “[Christ] loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Whenever you are tempted to doubt God’s love for you, take a long look at the cross on which Jesus died. Then realize that, for all practical purposes, it was not nails that held him to the cross, but love.

2. *Forsaken That We Might Be Forgiven* (see Luke 23:32-49, page 99).

Many of us have heard this story at some point in our lives. Yet the significance behind this heartwrenching scene is often missed or misunderstood. This was not simply some “good teacher” being crucified for his beliefs. It was God in human form who hung on that cross, bridging the gap between sinful people and a holy God.

Matthew's Gospel tells us that when Jesus hung on that cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:46). Many Bible scholars believe that those words marked the precise moment at which God placed the sins of the world upon his Son. The Bible, speaking of God, says, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Habakkuk 1:13, NKJV). For that reason, the holy Father had to "turn his face" and pour out his wrath upon his own Son. On the cross, Jesus received the wages that were due us. He was not heard that we might be heard. The ear of God was closed to Jesus for a time that it might never be closed to us.

3. Christ, the Sole Mediator (see 1 Timothy 2:5-6, page 260). Why is there only one mediator who is qualified to bridge the gap between God and people? Haven't there been other religious leaders who have claimed to have *the* way to God? Haven't some of them also died as a result of their message?

While the answers to these questions may be yes, the truth is that not one of these other leaders was fully God and fully human. That is why Jesus is uniquely qualified to deal with sin. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Acts 4:12 tells us, "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." And, most important, Jesus Christ rose from the dead!

Though it is true that you must believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins in order to receive eternal life and be a true Christian, there is still something else you must do.



the response: accept God's offer

To know Jesus Christ personally and have your sins forgiven, you must believe that you are a sinner separated from God and that your only hope is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came and died for your sins. To stop here, however, would be to stop short of salvation.

There are two things you must now do to enter into a relationship with the God from whom you have been separated.

1. Turn From Your Sins. As Jesus began his public ministry, his first message was "Repent of your sins" (Mark 1:15). In essence, Jesus was telling the

people to repent—to acknowledge their sinning, change their minds, and change the direction of their lives.

Look at it this way. In the past, we have been blinded by our sins, causing us to run from God. As we repent, we do a “U-turn” and start running toward him. It is not enough just to be sorry for our sins. We must also change our lifestyle, for the Bible teaches that “the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin” (2 Corinthians 7:10). In other words, if you are really sorry for something, it will result in a change in your actions.

The apostle Paul summed up this change succinctly when he quoted Jesus, who had said that people must “turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me” (Acts 26:18).

You see, there are some things only God can do and some things only you can do. Only God can remove your sins and give you the gift of eternal life, but only you can turn from your sins and receive Jesus as your Savior. That brings up the second thing you must do to respond to God’s offer.

2. *Believe in Jesus Christ and Receive Him into Your Life.* Having seen the enormity of your sin and decided to turn from it, you then must believe in and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Becoming a Christian, however, is far more than following a creed or trying to live by certain standards. Jesus said that you must be “born again,” or more literally, “born from above” (John 3:3). This spiritual rebirth happens when we personally believe in Jesus Christ, receive him by inviting him into our lives, and turn from our sins. In other words, we ask Jesus to come and take residence in our lives, making the changes he deems necessary. A person must take this all-important step in order to become a child of God.

Notice that this offer is yours for the asking, and it is free. You don’t have to work for it, trying to clean up your life before you make this life-changing decision. The Bible says, “The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Being a Christian also means having a relationship with the living God. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus said, “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” To better understand the meaning of this verse, it is important to understand the culture at the time it was written. Eating together in Bible times was a long, drawn-out affair. People would not sit on chairs behind tables in a formal setting as we do, but they would sit on the floor, reclining on pillows around a low table. The relaxed atmosphere made meals a time when you would not only satisfy your appetite but also receive a gratifying

sharing of enjoyable table conversation. You would share your heart and life with those who sat beside you.

Consequently, when Jesus says that he will “share a meal” with us, it implies intimacy, closeness, and friendship. He offers this to us, but we must first “hear him calling” us.

To hear God calling us, we must know how he speaks. One way in which God speaks to us is described in the Bible as a “still, small voice.” This could be described in another way as that tug you might have felt on your heart from the Holy Spirit showing you your need for Jesus. He may even be speaking to you right now! It is at that point that you must “open the door.” Only you can do that. Jesus will not force his way in.

Receiving Jesus Christ into Your Heart. If you are ready to turn from your sins and believe in Jesus Christ so that you can receive the forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life, then take a moment to bow your head and pray a prayer like this one right now:

God, I'm sorry for my sin. I turn from it right now. I thank you for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sin.

Jesus, I ask you to come into my heart and live right now. Be my Lord, Savior, and friend. Help me to follow you all the days of my life as your disciple.

Thank you for forgiving and receiving me right now. Thank you that my sin is forgiven and that I am going to heaven. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Rededicating Your Life to Jesus Christ. Perhaps you are already a Christian but you have strayed from Jesus Christ. You have been a prodigal son or daughter. God will forgive you right now if you will return to him. He tells us in Scripture, “My wayward children . . . come back to me, and I will heal your wayward hearts” (Jeremiah 3:22). If you would like to return to God and rededicate your life to him right now, you may want to pray something like this:

God, I am sorry for my sin. I am sorry that I have strayed from you. I ask you to forgive me now as I repent of my sin. I don't want to live like a prodigal any longer.

Renew and revive me as I once again follow you as my God. Thank you for your forgiveness. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Whether you prayed to make a first time commitment or a recommitment, you have made the right decision. God has forgiven and received you if you really meant it. Know that your relationship with Jesus Christ will bring radical and

dramatic changes in your life. Describing this, the Bible says, “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Now that is good news! But more importantly, God has changed your eternal destiny. Instead of fearing an eternal punishment in a place called hell, you will spend peaceful eternity in his presence in heaven.

Read the next section to see what else God has done for you now that you have taken this step.



what God has done for you

What actually happens when Jesus Christ comes into your life? First, he saves you from your sins and the punishment you deserve as a result of them—eternity in hell. This is called salvation, or regeneration, and has to do with what takes place in your heart: God gives you new life.

Second, he justifies you. Justification has to do with your standing before God and includes the complete removal and forgiveness of your sins. Think about it! When you receive Jesus Christ into your life, you are completely forgiven. God’s Word tells us, “Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins! Everyone who believes in him is declared right with God [justified]—something the law of Moses could never do” (Acts 13:38-39). Speaking of our sins, God says, “I will never again remember [your] sins and lawless deeds” (Hebrews 10:17). What a wonderful promise!

Justification, however, is more than just the forgiveness and removal of the guilt and condemnation that accompany sin. While God has removed your sins and forgiven you of them, he has also placed the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ “into your account,” so to speak. You don’t have to earn it or try to achieve it. It is yours as a gracious gift from the God who loves you. To understand justification more fully, read the following Scripture passages and notes below.

1. God Promises Us His Gracious Forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9, page 305).

The word *confess* means “to say the same thing as another” or “to agree with.” To confess means that we are agreeing with God about our sin. We are seeing it as he does. We know that God hates sin. Therefore, to truly confess our sin

means that we essentially feel the same way God feels about what we have done. After committing that sin, we will be determined to put it out of our lives and never do it again. That is true confession in the biblical sense. The reason many believers are not experiencing the forgiveness and joy they desire is because they have not yet truly confessed! Once we have met God's conditions, however, we will know his gracious forgiveness. We may not "feel" forgiven, but we are. We have his word on it.

2. *God Has Balanced Our Moral and Spiritual Budget* (see Romans 5:1-2, page 173). When God makes us right in his sight, he does so by placing all of the righteousness of Christ to our credit. This balances the moral and spiritual budget for us. We now have sufficient "capital of character" to get on with the business of living.

Up to this point, salvation has been God's responsibility. From this point on, it continues to be his responsibility except that we are responsible for the wise investment of our "capital of character"—that is, we are responsible for living as God desires us to. It is as if your checking account were empty, but then someone made a \$100,000 deposit. What you do with that money is up to you.

3. *God Calls Us His Children* (see Luke 15:11-32, page 86). This incredible story illustrates what happens when a person turns from sin and returns to God. First, notice that the father in the story did not give this prodigal son what he deserved—banishment. In the same way, we do not receive from God what we deserve—punishment for sin. Second, the young man was given what he did not deserve—the rights and privileges of full sonship. Likewise, although we are not worthy to be called children of God, he calls us sons and daughters. In summary, he doesn't give us what we deserve (judgment). He gives us what we don't deserve (forgiveness and justification).

Speaking of sons and daughters, read on to see how God has adopted you into his family.



adopted and assured

We have looked at what happens when we are regenerated (when Christ comes into our lives) and when we are justified (when God forgives our sin and puts his righteousness in its place). Now let us look at another incredible thing God has done for us. He has adopted us into his family as his children!

Adoption means “to be given the rights of a son.” In essence, you have been given the full rights of sonship in the family of God as though you were born that way. The story of the Prodigal Son illustrates this (Luke 15:11-32). The wayward son thought that after leaving home, he would no longer be considered a son but would instead be treated as a hired servant. Much to his surprise, when he made the long journey home, his father welcomed him and smothered him with kisses. He then gave orders to bring out the best robe and to put a ring on his finger, signifying full rights as a son. That is exactly what God has done for you! Take some time now to examine three Scripture passages that assure you of your adoption into God’s family.

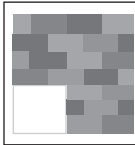
1. *God Disciplines His Children* (see Hebrews 12:5-9, page 286). Recognizing you are now a child of God is not some distant hope but a present reality. One of the ways God will remind you of this is by correcting you and bringing you back into line like a loving father when you stray away from him.

Before we were believers, we may have felt no sense of guilt for certain things we did or did not do. But now that we are Christians, God’s Holy Spirit shows us the way to live, which includes correcting us. He does this not because he hates us, but because he loves us as his own dear children. Understanding this truth should help us in the way we behave.

2. *You Have an Approachable Father* (see Galatians 4:6, page 224). The Aramaic word translated “dear Father” is *abba*, which is a word of affection that a young child would use endearingly toward his or her father. A Western equivalent of that phrase would be “papa” or “daddy.” God does not want to be viewed as some distant, uninterested father, but as a loving, approachable father to whom you can turn at any time because you are his child.

3. *His Promises Are Not Based upon Your Feelings* (see 1 John 5:11-13, page 311). There will be times as a Christian when you may not “feel” God’s presence. You may even be tempted to doubt that he has come into your life. But 1 John 5:13 does not say, “I write this to you who believe in the Son of God so that you may *feel* you have eternal life.” This is because feelings come and go. They fluctuate. Nor does the Bible say, “I write this so that you may *hope*—if God is in a really good mood—that you have eternal life.” It says, “so that you may *know*. . . .” Eternal life is yours! Stand on God’s promise to you. You are forgiven, justified, adopted into his family, and assured of salvation. Now that is reason to rejoice!

To find out more about God, turn to “Who Is God?” on the next page in the Cornerstones section.



cornerstones

foundational truths of the faith

who is God?

Thousands of years ago, Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, posed a question people are still asking today: “Who is the LORD that I should listen to him?” That’s a good question, but it is not an easy subject to tackle. It is difficult for our limited minds to grasp the limitless, eternal God. It has been said, “If God were small enough for your minds, he wouldn’t be big enough for your needs.” For that reason, don’t be exasperated if you can’t fully understand who God is or why he does certain things. One day, Scripture promises, everything about God and his character will be made perfectly clear to us (1 Corinthians 13:12). But until then, we will find everything we need to know about him in his Word. Look up the following notes and passages to find out who God is.

- 1. God Is All-Knowing, Ever Present, and All-Powerful.** The Creator of the Universe knows every intimate detail of his creation (see Matthew 10:29-31, page 13).
- 2. God Is Holy.** God’s incomparable holiness merits our worship (see Revelation 15:2-4, page 330).
- 3. God Is Loving and Just.** God’s justice is tempered by his love (see 2 Peter 3:3-9, page 302).
- 4. God Is Personal.** This characteristic of God sets him apart from the so-called “gods” of other religions (see Acts 17:22-31, page 156).
- 5. God Is in Control.** It is important to remember that God is still in control, even if things around us seem to be in chaos (see Romans 11:33-36, pages 182-183).
- 6. The God of the Bible Is the One True God.** While some insist on the existence of many gods, only the God of the Bible is the true, living God, worthy of our devotion (see 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, page 198).

who is Jesus?

Throughout history many people have attempted to answer this question. Some have done so accurately, but many have not. Our best source for answering this question is—once again—God’s own Word. The Bible presents us with some inescapable truths about Jesus that demand a response. Anyone who seriously studies Scripture to learn more about Jesus must answer two probing questions: (1) What do you think of Jesus Christ? and (2) Who is he? The writer C. S. Lewis made this observation: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to” (*Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1952], 41).

Jesus was not just a good man. He was—and is—the God-man. Let’s examine what the Bible has to say about Jesus.

- 1. *Jesus Is Human.*** Jesus became our supreme example as God in human form (see Philippians 2:5-11, page 238).
- 2. *Jesus Is Divine.*** Even though Jesus became human, he still remained God (see Colossians 1:15-20, page 244).
- 3. *Jesus Had a Specific Mission to Accomplish.*** Jesus came to save humankind from sin (see Luke 4:16-21, page 68).
- 4. *Jesus Made the Ultimate Sacrifice.*** Jesus endured tremendous pain so that we could enjoy eternity with him (see 1 Peter 2:24, page 297).
- 5. *Jesus Has Great Power to Transform People.*** Jesus can change the most unlikely person into one of the most powerful witnesses on his behalf (see Acts 4:13, page 134).
- 6. *Jesus Has an Eternal Dominion.*** Jesus’ Kingdom extends beyond the boundaries of space and time (see Revelation 1:4-8, page 320).

who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the most mysterious member of the Trinity, which includes God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Spirit (or the Holy Spirit). Many struggle with the idea of God being three persons, yet one. Quite honestly, we will never fully grasp the concept this side of heaven.

Some, however, have wrongly thought of the Holy Spirit as more of an “it” than a “he.” That is probably due in part to biblical descriptions of him as being

like the wind or coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove, among other comparisons.

Yet these descriptions must be balanced with the descriptions of the other members of the Trinity. For instance, Jesus referred to himself as “the bread of life” and “the good shepherd.” In the same way, God the Father is referred to as “a refuge” and “a consuming fire.” Does this mean that Jesus is a loaf of bread or a sheep farmer, or that the Father is a pile of rocks or a blast furnace? Of course not! These are simply metaphors used in Scripture to help communicate God’s character. Likewise, the unique descriptions attributed to the Holy Spirit do not imply that the Holy Spirit is merely some “force” or “power.” Jesus said this about the Holy Spirit: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . . He will tell you about the future” (John 16:13). Note the use of the pronoun *he*. The Holy Spirit has a distinct personality, and he also has specific work that he wants to do in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. Explore what the Bible says about him.

- 1. *Whom the Holy Spirit Helps.*** The Holy Spirit strengthens and empowers followers of Christ (see Acts 2:1-41, page 132).
- 2. *How the Holy Spirit Works with the Father and the Son.*** The Holy Spirit works alongside God the Father and Jesus, God’s Son, to make our lives pleasing to God (see 1 Peter 1:2, page 296).
- 3. *Why God Gives Us the Holy Spirit.*** The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives is God’s mark of ownership (see Ephesians 1:13-14, page 228).
- 4. *How the Holy Spirit Works in Our Lives.*** The Holy Spirit draws us to Christ, enters our lives at conversion, and empowers us as we allow him to work in our lives (see John 14:15-17, page 120).
- 5. *When the Holy Spirit Can Be Sinned Against.*** There are six specific ways we can sin against the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:1-10, page 138).
- 6. *Why Christians Need the Holy Spirit.*** Living the Christian life is impossible without the Holy Spirit’s help (see Galatians 5:16-26, page 222).

who is the devil?

What is the devil like? Does he really look like the red-suited, pitchfork-holding cartoon caricature seated on a throne in hell? Or does he roam through the earth disguised as an angel of light?

Unfortunately, far too many people do not have an accurate view of who the devil is. Many underestimate him and his prowess, even going so far as to doubt his very existence. Someone once asked the great evangelist Charles Finney, “Mr. Finney, do you believe in a literal devil?” Finney replied, “You try opposing him

for a while, and you see if he's literal or not." You will find out how literal the devil is the moment you make a commitment to Jesus Christ.

The Bible clearly shows us just how active and conniving the devil really is. At the same time, Scripture also lets us know about the devil's limitations and ultimate demise. The more we understand the tactics of this intelligent spirit being, the better equipped we will be to ward off his attacks. Below are some key passages of Scripture that answer some of the most commonly asked questions about the devil—who is also referred to as Satan.

- 1. *Where Did Satan Come From?*** Satan's pride led to his fall from heaven (see Revelation 12:7-9, page 327).
- 2. *What Are Satan's Abilities?*** Satan does have the power and access to do certain things in this world (see 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, page 212).
- 3. *What Are Satan's Limitations?*** While we should not underestimate Satan's power, we should realize that it is limited (see 2 Timothy 4:18, page 268).
- 4. *How Does Satan Attack People?*** Satan masterfully uses manipulation and distortion to deceive people (see 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, page 218).
- 5. *Who Can Thwart Satan's Agenda?*** Those who lay down their lives for Christ will defeat this evil foe (see Revelation 12:10-12, page 328).

what are angels?

According to recent surveys, most people believe in the existence of angels. A glut of books on the subject fills bookstore shelves. Still, our only reliable source on angels and their activity is the Bible. Just who are these mysterious creatures? What do they look like? Do they wear long, flowing robes and have large birdlike wings? And what is their purpose?

You might call angels "God's secret agents." They basically work undercover. Most of the time these secret agents remain invisible—except on those special occasions when God allows people to see them. No doubt God realized that if we were allowed to see them all of the time, they would become an object of our worship, which is to be reserved for God alone. Let's take some time to see what the Bible has to say about angels and their role in this world.

- 1. *Why Did God Create Angels?*** God created angels as unique spiritual beings who worship Christ and care for his followers (see Hebrews 1:4-14, page 276).
- 2. *What Do Angels Do in the Life of a Christian?*** God has ordered the angels to protect his followers and keep them from harm (see Acts 27:23-24, page 165).



first steps

what to do after you
have accepted Christ

study the Bible

You might say that the Bible is the “user’s manual of life” we have all been searching for. Everything we need to know about God and living a life that pleases him is found in its pages.

Tragically, some of us go through life without so much as picking up this amazing book, whose words were inspired by God. Yet success or failure in the Christian life is determined by how much of the Bible we get into our hearts and minds and how obedient we are to the principles and teachings found within it. Just as we need to continually breathe oxygen to survive, we need to regularly study the Bible to grow and flourish spiritually. Here is an important reason why we need to spend time in this life-changing book.

- 1. Studying the Bible Is Necessary for Our Spiritual Growth.** The Bible performs three functions to help us mature spiritually (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17, page 267).
- 2. Studying the Bible Keeps Us Spiritually Strong.** The more we get into this book and apply its teachings, the more we will be able to stand our ground in the storms and trials of life (see Matthew 7:24-27, page 10).
- 3. Studying the Bible Makes Scripture a Central Part of Our Lives.** God desires that we make the Bible an integral part of our lives (see Colossians 3:16, page 247).
- 4. Studying the Bible Helps Us Apply Its Truth to Our Lives.** We will notice positive changes in our lives as we apply what we read in Scripture (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17, page 267).

pray

The idea of talking to God can be intimidating. But it doesn't have to be. In fact, prayer can be a wonderful experience if we know how to do it God's way. Fortunately, we have God's Word to teach us how to pray. The Bible instructs us to pray at all times, in any posture, in any place, for any reason. In addition, it does not matter whether you pray in King James English or the most contemporary jargon. God only desires that you pray from a pure and sincere heart.

The disciples observed the profound effect prayer had in Jesus' life and ministry. They witnessed how Jesus would often go off by himself to spend time in prayer with his heavenly Father. They saw the power, peace, and tranquillity that emanated from his life, giving him the ability to stay calm in troubled circumstances. Jesus' prayer life so impressed these men that they asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-13). Certainly if the perfect Son of God often took time to pray during his life here on earth, how much more do we, mere men and women, need to pray?

Because prayer is an essential ingredient to walking with Jesus Christ, we need to examine its elements found in God's Word.

- 1. Prayer Was Modeled for Us by Christ.** Jesus took the time to show his followers how to pray (see Matthew 6:5-15, page 7).
- 2. Prayer Is Not a Solitary Experience.** God has given us his Holy Spirit to aid us in prayer, even when we do not know what to pray (see Romans 8:26-27, page 175).
- 3. Prayer Allows Us to Voice Our Requests to God.** Prayer is God's appointed way for us to relate our concerns and present our needs to him (see James 4:2-3, page 291).
- 4. Prayer Enables Us to Seek Forgiveness.** When we pray sincerely for forgiveness, God will hear our prayers and restore us (see James 5:15-16, page 294).
- 5. Prayer Helps Us Overcome Worry.** In the midst of troubles, we can receive God's peace through prayer (see Philippians 4:6-7, page 241).
- 6. Prayer Increases Our Spiritual Knowledge and Maturity.** God will give us greater spiritual understanding through prayer (see Colossians 1:9, page 243).

look for and attend the right church

One of the essential building blocks of spiritual growth is fellowship with other believers by becoming part of a local church. The church (meaning the entire



off and running

how your faith affects the daily aspects of your life

marriage

How many times have you heard the cliché, “They have a marriage made in heaven”? This statement implies that some marriages are destined to be good, while others are destined to be bad. Such thinking assumes that marriage has a life of its own, and the only way to find out if you are to have a “good” one or a “bad” one is to “give it a shot.” What most people don’t seem to understand, though, is that marriage is like a mirror. It reflects what it sees. If a marriage is strong, it is because the husband and wife have put a lot of hard work into it. If a marriage is weak, it is because the husband or wife or both have neglected it.

God never intended for anyone to have a weak marriage. His design for marriage is a lifelong, fulfilling companionship. For a couple’s marriage to thrive within his design, the couple must obey God and his Word and lay aside this world’s distorted and perverse concept of marriage. The Bible contains truths that will not only help keep a couple together but will also keep their marriage strong. In fact, the lessons the Bible gives on marriage should serve as the foundation of every Christian couple’s relationship. Whether you are married or single, the following verses will give you a godly perspective on marriage relationships.

- 1. *God Created Marriage.*** We can learn more about God’s marriage ideal from the world’s first husband and wife (see Matthew 19:4-6, page 25).
- 2. *Husbands and Wives Have Distinct Roles in Marriage.*** A marriage works when a couple follows God’s specific design for the husband and the wife (see Ephesians 5:21-33, page 232).
- 3. *The Boundaries of Marriage Are to Be Honored and Enjoyed.*** Sexual intimacy is meant to be enjoyed only within the bounds of the marriage relationship (see Hebrews 13:4, page 287).

- 4. Keeping Your Marriage Strong.** God promises punishment to those who commit adultery or lead immoral lives (see Hebrews 13:4, page 286).
- 5. Divorce Is Not Part of God's Plan.** Jesus teaches that marriage is meant to be a lifelong commitment (see Mark 10:2-12, page 50).
- 6. A Christian Should Not Leave a Non-Christian Spouse.** An unbelieving husband or wife should not be abandoned, but loved (see 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, page 198).
- 7. Marriage Is Not for Everyone.** Although God blesses many with marriage, some are given a calling or ability to remain single (see 1 Corinthians 7:1-40, page 196).
- 8. There Is an Intimacy in Marriage That Can Be Found Nowhere Else.** God wants you to have a fulfilling, enjoyable sex life within the parameters of marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, page 196).

children

God's plan is to build, strengthen, and protect the family. Satan's plan is to undermine, weaken, and destroy it. Make no mistake: Satan has declared war on the family. Tragically, many of us have been willing accomplices. Why? Because the bulk of the problems in our culture today can be directly traced to the breakdown of the family or to homes in which biblical principles are ignored or disobeyed. This not only includes husbands and wives splitting apart, but also "alternative families," such as homosexual marriages and "live-in" lovers. Such relationships will never be blessed or honored by God, for they are clearly outside the parameters of his will. It has been said, "A family can survive without a country, but a country cannot survive without the family."

Fortunately, there is hope. The Bible gives us specific guidelines to follow when it comes to parenting. If they are put into practice, we will see amazing results. See what the Bible has to say about raising children who love and revere the Lord in a world that is often hostile to God and his values.

- 1. Children Are Never Too Young to Learn about God.** Teaching your children to love the Lord in their early years will help them stay true to the Lord later in life (see Galatians 6:7-9, page 226).
- 2. Make Sure Your Children Hear the Gospel Message.** The gospel must first be preached in the home (see Acts 16:29-34, page 152).
- 3. Encourage Your Children's Spiritual Growth.** As the apostle Paul suggests, a loving father encourages his children to live a life pleasing to God (see 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, page 250).



big questions

what the Bible has to say about
some of life's troubling issues

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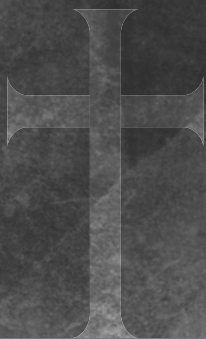
a note to READERS

The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT's influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT's precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004 and is reflected in this edition of the New Living Translation.

The goal of any Bible translation is to convey the meaning and content of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as accurately as possible to contemporary readers. The challenge for our translators was to create a text that would communicate as clearly and powerfully to today's readers as the original texts did to readers and listeners in the ancient biblical world. The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services.

We believe that the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God's word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way.

The Publishers
July 2004



Matthew

AUTHOR: MATTHEW (Levi) | DATE WRITTEN: A.D. 60–65 | GENRE: GOSPEL

This Gospel was written with the Jew in mind and therefore has many references to Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus. It contains at least 129 quotations or allusions to the Old Testament. Matthew's objective was to show the Jewish people that Jesus was indeed their long-awaited Messiah.

CHAPTER 1

The Ancestors of Jesus the Messiah

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David* and of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Ram.*

⁴ Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asa.*

⁸ Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.*

Jehoram was the father* of Uzziah.

⁹ Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

¹⁰ Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amon.*

Amon was the father of Josiah.

¹¹ Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).

¹² After the Babylonian exile:

Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Akim.

Akim was the father of Eliud.

¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

¹⁸This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to

1:1 Greek *Jesus the Messiah, son of David*. 1:3 Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. 1:7 Greek *Asaph*, a variant spelling of Asa; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. 1:8a Greek *Joram*, a variant spelling of Jehoram; also in 1:8b. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. 1:8b Or *ancestor*; also in 1:11. 1:10 Greek *Amos*, a variant spelling of Amon; also in 1:10b. See 1 Chr 3:14. 1:11 Greek *Jeconiah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6.

disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement* quietly.

²⁰As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,* for he will save his people from their sins."

²²All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,*
which means 'God is with us.'"

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

CHAPTER 2

Visitors from the East

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²⁴"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,* and we have come to worship him."

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities* of
Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people
Israel.'"

⁷Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

⁹After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were

filled with joy! ¹¹They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹²When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."*

¹⁶Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. ¹⁷Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A cry was heard in Ramah—
weeping and great mourning.
Rachel weeps for her children,
refusing to be comforted,
for they are dead."*

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰"Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead."

²¹So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²²But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

CHAPTER 3

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His mes-

1:19 Greek to divorce her. 1:21 Jesus means "The LORD saves." 1:23 Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version). 2:1 Or royal astrologers; Greek reads magi; also in 2:7, 16. 2:2 Or star in the east. 2:6a Greek the rulers. 2:6b Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2. 2:15 Hos 11:1. 2:18 Jer 31:15.

sage was, ²“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”³ The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!
Clear the road for him!’”⁴

⁴John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁵People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. ⁶And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize,^{*} he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath?” ⁸Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ¹⁰Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize with^{*} water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”^{*} ¹²He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?”

¹⁵But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.”^{*} So John agreed to baptize him.

¹⁶After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened^{*} and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

CHAPTER 4

The Temptation of Jesus

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. ²For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

³During that time the devil^{*} came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

⁴But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,
‘People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the
mouth of God.’”^{*}

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, ⁶and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won’t even hurt your foot on a
stone.’”^{*}

⁷Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say,
‘You must not test the LORD your God.’”^{*}

⁸Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹“I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.”

¹⁰“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the LORD your God
and serve only him.’”^{*}

¹¹Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

The Ministry of Jesus Begins

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. ¹³He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵“In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many
Gentiles live,

¹⁶the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.
And for those who lived in the land
where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”^{*}

3:2 Or *has come, or is coming soon.* 3:3 Isa 40:3 (Greek version). 3:7 Or *coming to be baptized.* 3:11a Or *in.* 3:11b Or *in the Holy Spirit and in fire.* 3:15 Or *for we must fulfill all righteousness.* 3:16 Some manuscripts read *opened to him.* 4:3 Greek *the tempter.* 4:4 Deut 8:3. 4:6 Ps 91:11-12. 4:7 Deut 6:16. 4:10 Deut 6:13. 4:15-16 Isa 9:1-2 (Greek version).

¹⁷From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*”

The First Disciples

¹⁸One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.

¹⁹Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!”

²⁰And they left their nets at once and followed him.

²¹A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. ²²They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

Crowds Follow Jesus

²³Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.

²⁴News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all.

²⁵Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,* Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

4:17 Or *has come, or is coming soon.* 4:25 Greek *Decapolis.* 5:11 Some manuscripts omit *and lie about you.*

CHAPTER 5

The Sermon on the Mount

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ²and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

³“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,*

for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

⁴ God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.

⁶ God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,*

for they will be satisfied.

⁷ God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

⁹ God blesses those who work for peace,

for they will be called the children of God.

¹⁰ God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,

for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

¹¹“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you* and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.

5:3 Greek *poor in spirit.* 5:6 Or *for righteousness.*



off and running
WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE OUR TRUE CONDITION
 Read MATTHEW 5:3-5

Jesus shows us the way to true happiness in this text. And believe it or not it has nothing to do with personal fulfillment. Here Jesus gives us a

three-step prescription to spiritual health and happiness:

1. See Yourself as You Really Are. When you realize your need for God (verse 3), you see yourself as you really are: a sinner, in desperate need of God’s forgiveness. This is the first step. The phrase “need for [God]” in this verse comes from a verb meaning “to shrink, cower, or cringe.” It speaks of someone who is destitute and completely dependent on others. Therefore, to realize your need for God is to admit that you are spiritually destitute apart from God.

2. Take Action. Another way to translate verse 4 is “happy are the unhappy.” Because we see ourselves as we really are, we mourn over our condition. This

And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

Teaching about Salt and Light

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Teaching about the Law

¹⁷“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. ¹⁹So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

5:21 Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17 5:22a Some manuscripts add *without cause*. 5:22b Greek uses an Aramaic term of contempt: *If you say to your brother, ‘Raca.’* 5:22c Greek *if you say, ‘You fool.’* 5:22d Greek *Gehenna*; also in 5:29, 30. 5:23 Greek *gift*; also in 5:24. 5:26 Greek *the last kodrantes* [i.e., quadrans]. 5:27 Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18. 5:29 Greek *your right eye*. 5:30 Greek *your right hand*.

Teaching about Anger

²¹“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’* ²²But I say, if you are even angry with someone,* you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot,* you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone,* you are in danger of the fires of hell.*

²³“So if you are presenting a sacrifice* at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, ²⁴leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

²⁵“When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶And if that happens, you surely won’t be free again until you have paid the last penny.*

Teaching about Adultery

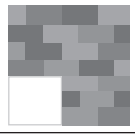
²⁷“You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’* ²⁸But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹So if your eye—even your good eye*—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your hand—even your stronger hand*—causes you to sin, cut it

leads us to begin making changes in our lives. Scripture tells us, “For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There’s no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Our true sorrow will lead to joy—salvation in Jesus Christ.

3. Pursue Meekness. Seeing ourselves as we really are produces two vital spiritual qualities: gentleness and lowliness (verse 5). We have an accurate and honest assessment of ourselves that, in turn, affects how we approach others. This contradicts the world’s way of thinking, which advocates standing up for your rights and asserting yourself in order to get what you deserve. The meekness Jesus describes here is not weakness or cowardice, but rather power under constraint, much like a powerful stallion submitting to the control of the bit.

The more we humble ourselves and admit our weaknesses, the more we will rely on God’s grace—and the happier we will be with ourselves and others.

For the next note on “Attitude toward Self,” turn to p. 288.



cornerstones

BEWARE OF THE SINS OF THE HEART

Read MATTHEW 5:27-30

Some people have the mistaken notion that unless you commit the act of adultery, you have not really sinned. They think it is OK to fantasize

about or look at someone, so long as you don't become involved with that person. But Jesus cuts straight to the core. He lets us know that even a lustful glance is as sinful as committing the act of adultery.

In the original Greek, one of the meanings for the word Jesus uses for "look" is intentional and repeated gazing. Jesus' remedy for someone who has a problem in this area seems rather harsh, but you really have to look at the context and the culture of the day to understand this radical but important statement.

In the Jewish culture, the right eye represented one's best vision and the right hand represented one's best skills. In essence, Jesus is saying that you should be willing to give up whatever is necessary to keep you from falling into this sin. That may mean terminating a relationship, canceling cable or a magazine subscription, or changing how or where you spend your spare time. Remove yourself from those things that can have a spiritually destructive effect on your life. Then take practical steps to fill your mind with the things of God: "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8).

For the next note on "Purity," turn to p. 252.

off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Teaching about Divorce

³¹"You have heard the law that says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.'³² But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.

Teaching about Vows

³³"You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the LORD.'³⁴ But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne.³⁵ And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King.³⁶ Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black.³⁷ Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.

Teaching about Revenge

³⁸"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye,

and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.⁴⁰ If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.⁴¹ If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile,⁴² carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

Teaching about Love for Enemies

⁴³"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor'* and hate your enemy.⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies!* Pray for those who persecute you!⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends,* how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

CHAPTER 6

Teaching about Giving to the Needy

"Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.² When you

^{5:31} Deut 24:1. ^{5:33} Num 30:2. ^{5:38} Greek the law that says: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21. ^{5:41} Greek *milion* [4,854 feet or 1,478 meters]. ^{5:43} Lev 19:18. ^{5:44} Some manuscripts add *Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you.* Compare Luke 6:27-28. ^{5:47} Greek *your brothers.*

give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. ³But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. ⁴Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Teaching about Prayer and Fasting

⁵“When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. ⁶But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

⁷“When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! ⁹Pray like this:

- Our Father in heaven,
 may your name be kept holy.
¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon.
 May your will be done on earth,
 as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today the food we need,*
¹² and forgive us our sins,
 as we have forgiven those who sin
 against us.
¹³ And don't let us yield to temptation,*
 but rescue us from the evil one.*

¹⁴“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

¹⁶“And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. ¹⁷But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Teaching about Money and Possessions

¹⁹“Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them,

6:11 Or Give us today our food for the day; or Give us today our food for tomorrow. **6:13a** Or And keep us from being tested. **6:13b** Or from evil. Some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.



first steps

PRAYER WAS
MODELED FOR US
BY CHRIST

Read MATTHEW 6:5-15

You have probably heard of “the Lord's Prayer.” Jesus gave us this prayer to show us *how* to pray. Incidentally, just because we call this prayer “the Lord's Prayer” does not mean that Jesus prayed it for himself. He had never sinned. It is more accurate to call this prayer “the Disciples' Prayer,” because Jesus gave it to his disciples in response to their request, “Lord, teach us to pray.” To better understand this prayer, we can break it down into two sets of petitions:

The first three petitions focus on the glory of God.

- “Our Father in heaven”: Recognize that you are addressing a holy God who sees you as his child.
- “May your name be kept holy”: Begin your prayers with reverence and praise for who God is. This will enable you to put your needs or problems in their proper perspective.
- “May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”: Ask God for his will to rule your life. You cannot pray “your Kingdom come” until you pray “my kingdom go.”

The second three petitions focus on our personal needs.

- “Give us today the food we need”: Tell God your physical and personal needs. Remember, Scripture tells us that God will provide for all of our needs (see Philippians 4:19, p. 241).
- “And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us”: Confess your sins to God. Psalm 66:18 says, “If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the LORD would not have listened.” If you are clinging to some sin, your prayer life will suffer.
- “And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one”: Recognize your inclination to fall into sin, and pray that the opportunity to sin will not lead to committing the sin.

Make it a point to include these important aspects in your personal prayers. By doing so, you will begin to understand how immense your God is and how small your problems are in comparison.

For the next note on “Pray,” turn to p. 175.


cornerstones
FORGIVENESS IS NOT SELECTIVE

Read MATTHEW 5:43-48

As one Bible commentator has put it, “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine.” Although

we are not divine, we do not have the liberty to choose whom we will forgive and not forgive. This means that we must not only forgive our enemies, but love them as well.

Loving our enemies is certainly something that does not come easily—or naturally. In fact, if we wait for some feeling of love to suddenly overtake us, it simply won’t happen. We must begin to pray for our enemies even before we are conscious of loving them. This is absolutely impossible to do apart from the help of the Holy Spirit. If you feel you fall short in the area of forgiveness, take heart. The Bible is full of examples of that divine ability to forgive, which can only come from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

- God’s Spirit enabled Abraham to give the best land to his traveling partner and nephew, Lot (Genesis 13:1-12).
- God’s Spirit gave Joseph the ability to embrace and kiss his brothers, who had sold him into slavery (Genesis 45:1-15).
- God’s Spirit kept David from taking advantage of an opportunity to kill King Saul, who was seeking David’s life (1 Samuel 24).
- God’s Spirit caused Stephen (the first Christian martyr) to pray for those who were stoning him to death (see Acts 7:59-60, p. 140).

But the ultimate example of forgiving one’s enemies comes from Jesus. While hanging on the cross, he prayed, “Father, forgive these people, for they don’t know what they are doing” (see Luke 23:34, p. 99). If the cruel torture of crucifixion would not silence Jesus’ prayer for his enemies, what pain, prejudice, or unfair treatment could justify the silencing of our prayers for our enemies? Just as God’s Spirit worked in the lives of the individuals above, he will enable you to love, pray, and do good to those who hate and hurt you.

To begin the next topic, turn to p. A30.

and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

²²“Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. ²³But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

²⁵“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more

valuable to him than they are? ²⁷Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

²⁸“And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, ²⁹yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

³¹“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ ³²These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³Seek the Kingdom of God* above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

³⁴“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

CHAPTER 7

Do Not Judge Others

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ²For you will be treated as you treat others.* The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.*

³“And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye* when you have a log in your own?”

⁴How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

⁶“Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy.* Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

Effective Prayer

⁷“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹“You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

The Golden Rule

¹²“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

The Narrow Gate

¹³“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell* is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

The Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. ¹⁶You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree

7:2a Or For God will judge you as you judge others.

7:2b Or The measure you give will be the measure you get back. 7:3 Greek your brother’s eye; also in 7:5. 7:4 Greek your brother. 7:6 Greek Don’t give the sacred to dogs.

7:13 Greek The road that leads to destruction.



first steps

HOW SHOULD YOU VIEW MATERIAL WEALTH?

Read MATTHEW 6:19-34

This section of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount deals with possibly the greatest distraction to following him wholeheartedly: wealth. This series of verses gives us at least three warnings about wealth and one prescription to overcome its enslaving effects:

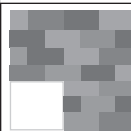
1. We Must Watch How and What We Store. Verse 19 says that we should not “store up treasures.” The idea here is not simply saving, but stockpiling. Jesus is not condemning saving your resources or providing for your family (Proverbs 6:6, and 1 Timothy 5:8, p. 262). He is condemning the accumulation of possessions in order to impress others. Enjoy what God has given you without making those possessions your primary ambition.

2. We Must Keep Our Vision Clear. While we can enjoy what God gives us, we need to understand that the material things of this world are only temporary. Our possessions can lose their value, be destroyed by natural disasters, get lost, or be stolen. That is the problem with making the accumulation of “things” your life’s passion. It is fleeting, unfulfilling, and even enslaving. Without proper perspective, we can easily become ensnared. Then we are no longer serving God but money (verses 22-24).

3. We Should Not Worry about Material Things. Worry is a powerful force that can divide or distract us. You can worry about anything in your life. But Jesus tells you to stop worrying, because God will *always* meet your needs (verses 25-30). Quite simply, worry is a waste of your valuable time as his servant.

4. We Must Put God First in Our Lives. Our main concern should not be acquiring material possessions or prestige. Our primary pursuit should be seeking to put Jesus Christ first in our lives (verses 31-34). It makes a lot of sense to place your temporary needs and worries in the hands of an eternal God.

For the next note on “Give to God,” turn to p. 261.



cornerstones

OUR WALK SHOULD MATCH OUR TALK

Read MATTHEW 7:21

In this verse, Jesus gets to the heart of every person's belief. He states that calling him Lord is not enough to get into heaven. That is because anyone can say

the word and not mean it. What counts is a changed person living in obedience to God's will.

Regarding the Christian life, it has been said, "It is not how high you can jump that matters, but how straight you can walk when you hit the ground again." You may be able to say all of the right things, but if your faith does not impact the way you live, it is meaningless—even offensive. In truth, you do not have a real relationship with God.

An engraving on a cathedral wall in Germany bears these soul-searching words:

Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us,

"You call me Master and obey me not;
 You call me light and see me not;
 You call me the Way and walk me not;
 You call me life and live me not;
 You call me wise and follow me not;
 You call me fair and love me not;
 You call me rich and ask me not;
 You call me eternal and seek me not;
 If I condemn you, blame me not."

The more we learn about what God has done for us, the more we will want to know about how to live for him. Our motives will come from a pure heart, not from selfish ambition. God is looking for genuine believers whose walk matches their talk. Are you one?

To begin the next topic, turn to p. A33.

produces bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ¹⁹So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

True Disciples

²¹"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²²On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

Building on a Solid Foundation

²⁴"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. ²⁵Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. ²⁶But anyone who

hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. ²⁷When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

CHAPTER 8

Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy

Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. ²Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him. "Lord," the man said, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean."

³Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "Don't tell anyone about this. Instead, go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy.* This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed."

8:4 See Lev 14:2-32.

The Faith of a Roman Officer

⁵When Jesus returned to Capernaum, a Roman officer* came and pleaded with him, ⁶“Lord, my young servant* lies in bed, paralyzed and in terrible pain.”

⁷Jesus said, “I will come and heal him.”

⁸But the officer said, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. ⁹I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, ‘Go,’ and they go, or ‘Come,’ and they come. And if I say to my slaves, ‘Do this,’ they do it.”

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to those who were following him, he said, “I tell you the truth, I haven’t seen faith like this in all Israel! ¹¹And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. ¹²But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

¹³Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, “Go back home. Because you believed, it has happened.” And the young servant was healed that same hour.

Jesus Heals Many People

¹⁴When Jesus arrived at Peter’s house, Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. ¹⁵But when Jesus touched her hand, the fever left her. Then she got up and prepared a meal for him.

¹⁶That evening many demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. He cast out the evil spirits with a simple command, and he healed all the sick. ¹⁷This fulfilled the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, who said,

“He took our sicknesses
and removed our diseases.”*

The Cost of Following Jesus

¹⁸When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he instructed his disciples to cross to the other side of the lake.

¹⁹Then one of the teachers of religious law said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

²⁰But Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man* has no place even to lay his head.”

8:5 Greek a *centurion*; similarly in 8:8, 13. 8:6 Or *child*; also in 8:13. 8:17 Isa 53:4. 8:20 “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself. 8:22 Greek *Let the dead bury their own dead*. 8:28 Other manuscripts read *Gerasenes*; still others read *Gergesenes*. Compare Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26.

²¹Another of his disciples said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.”

²²But Jesus told him, “Follow me now. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead.*”

Jesus Calms the Storm

²³Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. ²⁴Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

²⁶Jesus responded, “Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!” Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm.

²⁷The disciples were amazed. “Who is this man?” they asked. “Even the winds and waves obey him!”

Jesus Heals Two Demon-Possessed Men

²⁸When Jesus arrived on the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gadarenes,* two men who were possessed by demons met him. They lived in a cemetery and were so violent that no one could go through that area.

²⁹They began screaming at him, “Why are you interfering with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before God’s appointed time?”

³⁰There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding in the distance. ³¹So the demons begged, “If you cast us out, send us into that herd of pigs.”

³²“All right, go!” Jesus commanded them. So the demons came out of the men and entered the pigs, and the whole herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water.

³³The herdsman fled to the nearby town, telling everyone what happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴Then the entire town came out to meet Jesus, but they begged him to go away and leave them alone.

CHAPTER 9

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. ²Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven.”

³But some of the teachers of religious law said to themselves, “That’s blasphemy! Does he think he’s God?”

⁴Jesus knew* what they were thinking, so he asked them, “Why do you have such evil thoughts in your hearts? ⁵Is it easier to say ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Stand up and walk?’ ⁶So I will prove to you that the Son of Man* has the authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!”

⁷And the man jumped up and went home! ⁸Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for sending a man with such great authority.*

Jesus Calls Matthew

⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. ¹¹But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?*

¹²When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.”

¹³Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’* For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

A Discussion about Fasting

¹⁴One day the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked him, “Why don’t your disciples fast* like we do and the Pharisees do?”

¹⁵Jesus replied, “Do wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

¹⁶“Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before.

¹⁷“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved.”

Jesus Heals in Response to Faith

¹⁸As Jesus was saying this, the leader of a synagogue came and knelt before him. “My daughter has just died,” he said, “but you can bring her back to life again if you just come and lay your hand on her.”

¹⁹So Jesus and his disciples got up and went with him. ²⁰Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe, ²¹for she thought, “If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.”

²²Jesus turned around, and when he saw her he said, “Daughter, be encouraged! Your faith has made you well.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

²³When Jesus arrived at the official’s home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. ²⁴“Get out!” he told them. “The girl isn’t dead; she’s only asleep.” But the crowd laughed at him. ²⁵After the crowd was put outside, however, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up! ²⁶The report of this miracle swept through the entire countryside.

Jesus Heals the Blind

²⁷After Jesus left the girl’s home, two blind men followed along behind him, shouting, “Son of David, have mercy on us!”

²⁸They went right into the house where he was staying, and Jesus asked them, “Do you believe I can make you see?”

“Yes, Lord,” they told him, “we do.”

²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, “Because of your faith, it will happen.” ³⁰Then their eyes were opened, and they could see! Jesus sternly warned them, “Don’t tell anyone about this.” ³¹But instead, they went out and spread his fame all over the region.

³²When they left, a demon-possessed man who couldn’t speak was brought to Jesus. ³³So Jesus cast out the demon, and then the man began to speak. The crowds were amazed. “Nothing like this has ever happened in Israel!” they exclaimed.

³⁴But the Pharisees said, “He can cast out demons because he is empowered by the prince of demons.”

The Need for Workers

³⁵Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷He said to his disciples, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. ³⁸So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

9:4 Some manuscripts read *saw*. **9:6** “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself. **9:8** Greek for *giving such authority to human beings*. **9:11** Greek *with tax collectors and sinners?* **9:13** Hos 6:6 (Greek version). **9:14** Some manuscripts read *fast often*.

CHAPTER 10

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Apostles

Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them authority to cast out evil* spirits and to heal every kind of disease and illness.² Here are the names of the twelve apostles:

first, Simon (also called Peter),
then Andrew (Peter's brother),
James (son of Zebedee),
John (James's brother),

³ Philip,

Bartholomew,

Thomas,

Matthew (the tax collector),

James (son of Alphaeus),

Thaddaeus,*

⁴ Simon (the zealot*),

Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).

⁵ Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: "Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans,⁶ but only to the people of Israel—God's lost sheep. ⁷ Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.* ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!

⁹ "Don't take any money in your money belts—no gold, silver, or even copper coins. ¹⁰ Don't carry a traveler's bag with a change of clothes and sandals or even a walking stick. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve to be fed.

¹¹ "Whenever you enter a city or village, search for a worthy person and stay in his home until you leave town. ¹² When you enter the home, give it your blessing. ¹³ If it turns out to be a worthy home, let your blessing stand; if it is not, take back the blessing. ¹⁴ If any household or town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, shake its dust from your feet as you leave. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will be better off than such a town on the judgment day.

¹⁶ "Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. ¹⁷ But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and will be flogged with whips in the synagogues. ¹⁸ You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell the rulers and other unbelievers about me.* ¹⁹ When you are ar-

rested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. ²⁰ For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

²¹ "A brother will betray his brother to death, a father will betray his own child, and children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be killed. ²² And all nations will hate you because you are my followers.* But everyone who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When you are persecuted in one town, flee to the next. I tell you the truth, the Son of Man* will return before you have reached all the towns of Israel.

²⁴ "Students* are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master. ²⁵ Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master. And since I, the master of the household, have been called the prince of demons,* the members of my household will be called by even worse names!

²⁶ "But don't be afraid of those who threaten you. For the time is coming when everything that is covered will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. ²⁷ What I tell you now in the darkness, shout abroad when daybreak comes. What I whisper in your ear, shout from the housetops for all to hear!

²⁸ "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* ²⁹ What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin*? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. ³⁰ And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

³² "Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ "Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ "I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

³⁶ Your enemies will be right in your own household!*

³⁷ "If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being

10:1 Greek *unclean*. 10:3 Other manuscripts read *Lebbaeus*; still others read *Lebbaeus who is called Thaddaeus*.

10:4 Greek *the Cananean*, an Aramaic term for Jewish nationalists. 10:7 Or *has come, or is coming soon*. 10:18 Or *But this will be your testimony against the rulers and other unbelievers*. 10:22 Greek *on account of my name*. 10:23 "Son of Man" is a title Jesus used for himself. 10:24 Or *Disciples*. 10:25 Greek *Beelzeboul*; other manuscripts read *Bezezeboul*; Latin version reads *Beelzebub*. 10:28 Greek *Gehenna*. 10:29 Greek *one assarion* [i.e., one "as," a Roman coin equal to 1/16 of a denarius]. 10:35-36 Mic 7:6.



cornerstones

PEACE BEGINS WHEN WE RELINQUISH CONTROL OF OUR LIVES TO GOD

Read MATTHEW 11:28-30

In this passage, Jesus teaches us three things we must do in order to find true peace. Yet, for some odd reason, we sometimes find these

things difficult to do. Make a point of concentrating on practicing these three necessary actions:

1. Come to Christ. If you have already accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in your life, you have already completed this step. If you are still searching, you might be right at the door. But know this: You will not find peace from anyone or anything else. Sure, you can achieve temporary peace of mind, but when the bottom falls out, what happens then? Only Christ can guarantee you unending peace.

2. Exchange Your Yoke for His Yoke. A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that is placed over the neck of one or more oxen in order to help pull a wagon or any other piece of equipment. It enables a farmer to direct the oxen. Shifting the analogy to humans, our “heavy yoke” could be the weight of guilt, or the burden of trying to please God through our own good works. Jesus wants you to exchange that load for his lighter load—God’s grace. You can rest in knowing that you do not have to work for God’s favor; you need only to accept his Son.

3. Let Jesus Lead. This is undoubtedly one of the hardest parts of this promise because we want to be in control. But God says that we need to give him the reins so that he can teach us. Are you ready and willing to leave every aspect of your life in God’s hands? Then you will experience God’s promised “rest” for your soul.

For the next note on “Peace,” turn to p. 180.

mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine.³⁸ If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine.³⁹ If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.

⁴⁰“Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the Father who sent me.⁴¹ If you receive a prophet as one who speaks for God,* you will be given the same reward as a prophet. And if you receive righteous people because of their righteousness, you will be given a reward like theirs.⁴² And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded.”

CHAPTER 11

Jesus and John the Baptist

When Jesus had finished giving these instructions to his twelve disciples, he went out to teach and preach in towns throughout the region.

²John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus,³“Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting,* or should we keep looking for someone else?”

⁴Jesus told them, “Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen—⁵the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.⁶ And tell him, ‘God blesses those who do not turn away because of me.*’”

⁷As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. “What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind?⁸ Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces.⁹ Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet.¹⁰ John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,

‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
and he will prepare your way before you.*’

¹¹“I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!¹² And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing,* and violent people are attack-

10:41 Greek receive a prophet in the name of a prophet. 11:3 Greek Are you the one who is coming? 11:6 Or who are not offended by me. 11:10 Mal 3:1. 11:12 Or the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered from violence.

Now that you are a Christian, one thing you will want to do on a daily basis is study the Bible. You may, however, have some questions about this. For example, you may ask yourself, *How do I study the Bible?* Or, *Where do I begin reading?* This feature will answer those questions and give you the information you need to develop the basic techniques necessary for effective Bible study.

Pray for Wisdom and Understanding. The most often overlooked and undervalued aspect of Bible study is prayer. Yet prayer is essential to gaining wisdom and understanding when you read God's Word. Through prayer, you can approach God and acknowledge your incomplete knowledge of his Word, as well as your need for him to open your heart to his instruction. Therefore, determine to begin each study with prayer. Only God can give you the wisdom to understand his Word.

Read in an Orderly Manner. If you received a letter and read only a few sentences here and there, the letter would not make much sense to you. But if you read the letter in order, you would understand it. The same holds true when you read the New Testament.

Sadly, many Christians do not realize the shallowness of the slipping-around approach. They read a portion of Matthew, a story from Acts, a verse or two from James, and then a chapter or so from Revelation and wonder why they do not have a good understanding of God's Word. Furthermore, they end up misinterpreting the meaning of these passages because they have failed to grasp the context from which they came.

To avoid developing this poor habit, you need to discipline yourself to read in an orderly manner. One way to do this is to use an established reading plan. A reading plan lists Scripture passages to be read in a certain order. Many of the existing plans were created with a goal in mind. Some plans break the whole Bible down into 365 daily readings. Others help you read through the Bible in the order that the events actually happened. For now, you may want to use the following plan as your reading guide. Start with the Gospel of John. This Gospel was written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Then, after you have finished reading

John, read the rest of the New Testament. Once you have finished the New Testament, you should get a full Bible and read the books of the Old Testament. There you will see the coming of Jesus foreshadowed.

If you prefer a more structured approach, a one-year New Testament reading plan has been included on p. 339 to help you get started.

Finish What You Start. In life, the benefits of doing anything are often not realized until the task is completed. The same is true when reading a book from the Bible. Once you choose a book to read, read it from beginning to end. Although you may benefit spiritually by reading a verse from one book or a story from another, you will benefit more by reading the entire book from which the verse or story came. Reading the entire book puts each verse and story in its proper context. Thus, you will have a better understanding of what each verse and story means. In addition, by reading books from beginning to end you will become more familiar with the Bible as a whole. You may even discover passages that will one day become your favorites.

Meditate on God's Word and Ask Questions. Thinking about what you have read cannot be overemphasized. Meditating on what you have read helps you to discover the importance of the passage. It also helps you to examine your life in light of what God reveals in his Word.

One of the best ways to begin meditating on God's Word is to ask questions. Here are a few questions to help you get started:

- What is the main subject of the passage?
- To whom is this passage addressed?
- Who is speaking?
- About what or whom is the person speaking?
- What is the key verse?
- What does this passage teach me about God?

To see how the text might apply to you personally, ask yourself these questions:

- Is there any sin mentioned in the passage that I need to confess or forsake?
- Is there a command given that I should obey?
- Is there a promise made that I can apply to my current circumstances?
- Is there a prayer given that I could pray?

Invest in a Few Good Resource Books. The Bible alludes to many ancient customs that are completely unfamiliar to us today. Much of the subtle meaning behind these allusions that would give us greater insight into and appreciation for God's Word is therefore lost. To understand the culture in which the Bible was written, you may want to purchase a few good biblical resource books.

There are two types of resource books you should look into purchasing: (1) a one- or two-volume commentary on the whole Bible and (2) a Bible dictionary. Most one- or two-volume commentaries are concise. They give you the necessary information on important words, phrases, and verses from the Bible. They will not give you commentary on each verse, and they will not go into detailed explanations on any one verse. But they are good resources to help you begin to understand God's Word. The price for such a commentary can range from twenty-five to forty dollars per volume.

Bible dictionaries contain short articles (in alphabetical order) on people, places, and objects found in the Bible. Some Bible dictionaries also contain maps, diagrams, and pictures of biblical cities, regions, and artifacts. Bible dictionaries cost between twenty-five and thirty-five dollars. You can find these resources wherever Christian books are sold.

If you apply these practices to your daily personal Bible study, you are bound to develop habits that will help you grow in your faith.

one year new testament READING PLAN

January 1

Matthew 1:1-17
Romans 1:1-7

January 2

Matthew 1:18-25
Romans 1:8-15

January 3

Matthew 2:1-12
Romans 1:16-17

January 4

Matthew 2:13-23
Romans 1:18-32

January 5

Matthew 3:1-12
Romans 2:1-16

January 6

Matthew 3:13-17
Romans 2:17-29

January 7

Matthew 4:1-11
Romans 3:1-8

January 8

Matthew 4:12-25
Romans 3:9-20

January 9

Matthew 5:1-16
Romans 3:21-31

January 10

Matthew 5:17-48
Romans 4:1-12

January 11

Matthew 6:1-18
Romans 4:13-17

January 12

Matthew 6:19-34
Romans 4:18-25

January 13

Matthew 7:1-6
Romans 5:1-5

January 14

Matthew 7:7-12
Romans 5:6-11

January 15

Matthew 7:13-29
Romans 5:12-21

January 16

Matthew 8:1-17
Romans 6:1-14

January 17

Matthew 8:18-22
Romans 6:15-23

January 18

Matthew 8:23-34
Romans 7:1-6

January 19

Matthew 9:1-8
Romans 7:7-13

January 20

Matthew 9:9-13
Romans 7:14-25

January 21

Matthew 9:14-17
Romans 8:1-8

January 22

Matthew 9:18-26
Romans 8:9-17

January 23

Matthew 9:27-38
Romans 8:18-27

January 24

Matthew 10:1-18
Romans 8:28-39

January 25

Matthew 10:19-11:1
Romans 9:1-5

January 26

Matthew 11:2-19
Romans 9:6-18

January 27

Matthew 11:20-30
Romans 9:19-26

January 28

Matthew 12:1-21
Romans 9:27-33

January 29

Matthew 12:22-37
Romans 10:1-13

January 30

Matthew 12:38-50
Romans 10:14-21

January 31

Matthew 13:1-23
Romans 11:1-6

February 1

Matthew 13:24-35
Romans 11:7-12

February 2

Matthew 13:36-43
Romans 11:13-21

February 3

Matthew 13:44-58
Romans 11:22-27

February 4

Matthew 14:1-12
Romans 11:28-36

February 5

Matthew 14:13-21
Romans 12:1-5

February 6

Matthew 14:22-36
Romans 12:6-13

February 7

Matthew 15:1-20
Romans 12:14-21

February 8

Matthew 15:21-28
Romans 13:1-7

February 9

Matthew 15:29-39
Romans 13:8-14

February 10

Matthew 16:1-12
Romans 14:1-4

February 11

Matthew 16:13-28
Romans 14:5-9

February 12

Matthew 17:1-13
Romans 14:10-16

February 13

Matthew 17:14-21
Romans 14:17-23

February 14

Matthew 17:22-27
Romans 15:1-6

February 15

Matthew 18:1-20
Romans 15:7-17

February 16

Matthew 18:21-35
Romans 15:18-22

February 17

Matthew 19:1-12
Romans 15:23-33

Abuse

Jesus was abused (Matthew 26:67-68)

Abuse has no place in family relationships (Ephesians 5:21-6:4)

Accountability

We are accountable for every word that we speak (Matthew 12:36)

We are accountable for what we believe (John 3:18)

God will examine our actions (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Accusations

Christians' sins are forgiven (Colossians 1:22)

Adoption, Spiritual

Christians are God's children (John 1:12)

All of God's children are equal in God's eyes (Galatians 3:28)

God chose us to be his children (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Jesus is our spiritual brother (Hebrews 2:11)

Alcohol

Becoming drunk is a sin (Romans 13:13-14)

God hates drunkenness (Galatians 5:19-21)

Anger

Anger can give Satan a place in your life (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Christians should get rid of anger (Colossians 3:8)

Be slow to become angry (James 1:19)

Appearance

Christians should care more for spiritual status than physical appearance
(1 Timothy 2:9-10)

Do not judge others by their appearance (James 2:2-4)

Inner beauty is more important than physical beauty (1 Peter 3:1-6)

Arguments

We should avoid arguments (Philippians 2:14)

Armor

Spiritual armor prepares us for life (Romans 13:12)

The armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-18)

Assurance

We can be assured of eternal life (John 5:24)

Nothing can separate God's children from God (Romans 8:35-39)

Atonement

Jesus provided the atonement for sins (Romans 3:23-25)

Our atonement allows us to know God (Ephesians 2:13)

Sin requires that a sacrifice be made (Hebrews 9:22)

Jesus' sacrifice was perfect (1 Peter 1:18-19)

We cannot improve Jesus' sacrifice (1 Peter 3:18)

Attitude

God will reward the meek (Matthew 5:5)

We should imitate Jesus' attitude (Philippians 2:5)

Authority (see also Respect)

Jesus is the highest authority (Matthew 28:18)

God gave government its authority (John 19:11)

Christians should obey the government (Romans 13:1-2)

Parents are authorities to their children (Ephesians 6:1)

The Bible is our authority (2 Timothy 3:16)

Church leaders are authoritative (Hebrews 13:17)

Bad Language

Use good language (Ephesians 4:29)

Foul language is not fitting for a Christian (Ephesians 5:4)

Our speech reflects our relationship with God (Colossians 4:6)

Our speech should be an example to others (1 Timothy 4:12)

Baptism

Baptism signifies repentance (Matthew 3:11)

All followers of Jesus should be baptized (Matthew 28:19)

Baptism is closely linked with a changed life (Acts 2:38)

Entire families of the early church were baptized (Acts 16:33-34)

Belief

Belief affects the way we live (Mark 1:15)

Beliefs should reflect the heart (Romans 10:9)

Believing is more than acknowledging (James 2:21)

This list not only gives you twenty-three Bible stories you should be familiar with as a Christian, but it also provides an interesting reading plan. Using the list below, you can read through one great Bible story a week for a whole year.

1. Jesus' Birth

Matthew 1:18-25, pages 1-2; Luke 1:26-38, pages 61-62; Luke 2:1-7, page 64
In the most humble and amazing circumstances, the Savior of the world is born.

2. Jesus Visits the Temple as a Boy

Luke 2:41-52, page 65

As Jesus' parents return home from the Passover feast in Jerusalem, they notice that Jesus is not with them. Where they find him and what they find him doing astonish them.

3. Jesus' Baptism

Matthew 3:13-17, page 3; Mark 1:9-11, page 39; Luke 3:21-22, page 66;
John 1:29-34, page 102

At Jesus' baptism, God expresses his pleasure in his Son and calls him to public ministry.

4. Satan Tempts Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11, page 3; Mark 1:12-13, page 39; Luke 4:1-13, pages 66-67
Jesus withstands temptation from the devil himself, giving his followers a model to follow when they encounter temptation.

5. Jesus Clears the Temple

Matthew 21:12-17, page 27; Mark 11:15-19, pages 52-53; Luke 19:45-48,
page 93

In one bold act, Jesus shows his zeal for God's house, making bitter enemies in the process.

Memorizing Scripture is not really a difficult thing to do. You already have quite a bit in your memory bank: a few key phone numbers, your address, a relative's birthday, and many more essential pieces of information. So you *do* have the ability to memorize. The good news is that Scripture memorization is a refreshing exercise that the Lord will use to bless your life. As his Word says, "But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will *bless you for doing it*" (James 1:25, italics added).

Below are a few suggestions that may make memorizing God's Word easier for you:

1. When you pick a text to memorize, take time to read the verses surrounding the text so you can better understand the context of the verse. This will help you determine what the verse means.
2. Read the verse(s) several times aloud, and be sure to include the verse reference.
3. Think about the main idea of the verse and how it applies to you personally.
4. You may want to write down the verse several times. You may even choose to write the verse on little cards you can place on your bathroom mirror, in your car, on your refrigerator door, or any other place you frequently find yourself.
5. Review the verse frequently. As someone has said, you memorize a telephone number by dialing, Dialing, DIALING. You can memorize Scripture by reviewing, Reviewing, REVIEWING!
6. Finally, pray over the selected text throughout the day, asking God to help you comprehend its meaning as well as its significance in your own life.

As the verse in James attests, the more you memorize God's Word, the more you will find yourself doing what it says. In effect, filling your mind with Scripture is one of the strongest deterrents for temptation. That is because the more God's Word fills your heart and mind, the less likely you are to want to disregard his commands and displease him. In addition, making the Bible such a central focus of your day will "fill your lives" (Colossians 3:16).

Considering the benefits of Scripture memorization, here are some key verses to help you get started in this practice. The following verses have been selected to help you understand the message of salvation, encourage your spiritual growth, and remind you of God's promises as you journey through life.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**▶ We must acknowledge that we are sinners.**

ROMANS 3:23. Every person is guilty of sin and has fallen short of God's standard. *page 170*

JAMES 2:10. Breaking one of God's laws makes us as guilty as someone who has broken all of God's laws. *page 290*

ROMANS 3:10. No one can claim innocence before God. *page 170*

▶ We must understand the penalty for our sins.

ROMANS 6:23. The wages of sin is death. *page 175*

▶ We must confess and repent of our sins.

1 JOHN 1:9. God promises to forgive our sins when we confess them. *page 305*

ACTS 20:21. We must turn from our sin and turn to God. *page 157*

▶ We must believe that Christ is the only way of salvation.

JOHN 14:6. Jesus Christ alone leads you to God. *page 117*

ACTS 4:12. Salvation can be found through no one other than Christ. *page 134*

ROMANS 5:8. Christ's death demonstrates God's unconditional love. *page 173*

1 PETER 3:18. Christ, who never sinned, took the punishment for our sins on the cross of Calvary to bring us to God. *page 299*

ROMANS 10:9-10. Belief in Jesus' death and resurrection is essential to salvation. *page 180*

▶ We must receive Christ into our lives to obtain forgiveness and eternal life.

JOHN 3:3. We must be spiritually "reborn." *page 103*

JOHN 3:16. We are promised salvation by believing in Jesus Christ, God's Son. *page 103*

JOHN 10:9. Christ is the gate to salvation. *page 112*

REVELATION 3:20. Jesus waits for an invitation into our lives. *page 322*

EPHESIANS 2:8-9. We can only receive salvation through faith in Christ, not through our good works. *page 228*

TITUS 3:5. The salvation God extends washes away our sins and brings true joy. *page 271*

▶ We have the assurance of our salvation.

JOHN 1:12. We become a child of God by receiving his free gift of salvation. *page 101*

GALATIANS 2:20. We have been given a "new" life in Jesus Christ. *page 223*

ROMANS 8:1. We no longer have to fear condemnation. *page 176*

1 PETER 1:3-4. God has reserved for us the priceless gift of eternal life. *page 295*

1 PETER 1:23. Our new life comes from the living God, not from mortal man.

page 296

JOHN 10:27-28. The Lord personally guards our salvation. *page 112*

1 JOHN 5:13. Our assurance is based upon faith, not feeling. *page 311*

2 CORINTHIANS 1:22. God has placed the Holy Spirit in our hearts as proof that we belong to him. *page 210*

GALATIANS 4:6-7. We have all the privileges and rights that come from being God's children. *page 224*

GOD'S WORK IN OUR LIVES

▶ **God has a plan and purpose for us.**

ROMANS 8:28. Everything he allows in our lives is for our ultimate good.

page 177

2 TIMOTHY 1:9. He has chosen us to lead holy lives. *page 265*

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9. He has prepared wonderful things for those who love him. *page 191*

▶ **God will change us from the inside out.**

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17. The moment we accept Christ into our lives, we become an altogether "new" person. *pages 212-213*

COLOSSIANS 1:27. Jesus Christ has taken residence inside our hearts. *pages 244-425*

COLOSSIANS 3:10. We are being conformed to Christ's likeness. *page 247*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6. God will complete the work he has started in our lives. *page 237*

PHILIPPIANS 2:13. God will instill in you the desire to obey him. *page 239*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16. God will spiritually renew us every day. *page 211*

▶ **He will direct our lives.**

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-24. God will help to keep us devoted to him. *page 254*

JOHN 16:13. The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. *page 120*

JUDE 1:24-25. God is able to keep us from slipping and falling. *page 318*

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S GOODNESS

▶ **We should honor God with our lives.**

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20. We must remember that our body is the home of the Holy Spirit. *page 196*

ROMANS 12:1-2. We must not let this world squeeze us into its mold. *page 183*

EPHESIANS 2:10. We should spend our lives helping others. *page 228*

prophecies about JESUS

For the Gospel writers, one of the main reasons for believing in Jesus was the way his life fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Following is a list of some of the main prophecies and their fulfillments.

PROPHECY	<i>Old Testament Reference</i>	<i>New Testament Fulfillment</i>
Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6 Luke 2:1-20
Messiah was to be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38
Messiah was to be a prophet like Moses	Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19	John 7:40
Messiah was to enter Jerusalem in triumph	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-16
Messiah was to be rejected by his own people	Isaiah 53:1-3 Psalm 118:22	Matthew 26:3-4; John 12:37-43; Acts 4:1-12
Messiah was to be betrayed by one of his followers	Psalm 41:9	Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; Luke 22:16, 47-48
Messiah was to be tried and condemned	Isaiah 53:8	Luke 23:1-25; Matthew 27:1-2
Messiah was to be silent before his accusers	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 26:62-63; 27:12-14; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:8-10

What does it mean when someone refers to “the flesh”? What is the significance of the phrase “the blood”? And why is it important to “disciple” others? Whether you have just become a Christian or are simply interested in learning more about Christianity, you will soon discover that Christians sometimes seem to speak their own language. This basic glossary of commonly used Christian terms and phrases will help you uncover some of the mystery behind the Christian vocabulary. In addition, some entries will point you to areas of further study so that you can see how these expressions apply to your life. If for some reason you still have trouble comprehending what a Christian term means (or if it is not listed here), do not hesitate to ask a more mature Christian, a Bible study leader, or your pastor. As the saying goes, “There is only one bad question: the question you never ask.” The more you learn about your Christian faith and the God you now serve, the deeper and more meaningful your spiritual walk will be.

Abide: To remain consistently in fellowship with God by maintaining a close relationship with Jesus Christ. Most commonly used in the phrase “abide in Christ.” (For further study, turn to “Live as a Disciple,” page A42.)

Accepting Christ: To receive God’s gift of salvation by believing in Jesus Christ, asking God to forgive you of your sin that you have repented of, and inviting Christ to take up residence in your heart and allowing the Holy Spirit to change your life. (For further study, turn to How You Can Know God, page A11.) See also *Repent*.

Accountability: To be held responsible for your actions. For example, we are accountable to God for what we do with the talents and abilities he gives us. (For further study, turn to “Accountability,” page A35.)

Altar Call: See *Invitation*.

Angels: Spirit messengers who worship God and care for believers. (For further study, turn to “What Are Angels?” page A26.)

Antichrist: Literally means “false Christ” or “instead of” Christ. The Bible says that one great Antichrist, or “false Christ,” will appear in the final days before Christ’s

return to earth and will deceive many (see Revelation 13:1-7, pages 328-329). This term is also used to describe anyone who opposes Jesus Christ and his teachings (see 1 John 2:18, page 307; 1 John 4:3, page 310; 2 John 1:7, page 313).

Atonement: The removal of God's punishment for sin through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:25, page 170). (For further study, turn to "The Solution: Jesus Christ," page A13.)

Backslide: To stop moving forward in the Christian walk; to spiritually regress. (For further study, turn to "What Is Backsliding?" page 97.)

Baptism: 1. Water baptism is an outward display of what has happened in the life of the believer: the death of the old nature (when one is placed under the water), and the birth of a new nature (when one is raised up) (see Colossians 2:12, page 245). While it is not necessary for salvation, it demonstrates a person's submission to Christ. Baptism is also a demonstration of that person's willingness to live God's way. Jesus himself stressed its importance (see Matthew 28:19, page 38). 2. Spirit baptism occurs when the Holy Spirit enters a person's life. This baptism only occurs after he or she has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. See also *Filling of the Holy Spirit*.

Burdens: Refers to helping other believers by sharing in their trials, sorrows, and concerns so that they will not feel alone (see Galatians 6:1-3, page 226).

Believer: Someone who has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Blood (the): Refers to the blood Christ shed on the cross of Calvary, where he essentially became the sacrifice for our sins.

Body of Christ (the): Another term for the church—all those who call Jesus Christ their Lord. Throughout the New Testament Jesus Christ is often referred to as the "head" of this body (see Ephesians 1:22-23, page 228). See also *Church*.

Book of Life (the): A record found in heaven that lists the names of every individual who has committed his or her life to Jesus Christ and can be called a follower of God (Daniel 12:1; see Luke 10:20, page 78; Revelation 3:5, page 321; Revelation 21:27, page 336).

Born Again: Describes what takes place when a person accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior. Essentially, one becomes spiritually "reborn" at that point, escaping spiritual death and receiving eternal life (see John 3:3-7, page 103).

Bride of Christ (the): Another term for the church or Christian believers as a whole (see 2 Corinthians 11:2, page 218). See also *Church*.

Calling: 1. (Noun) God's invitation to men and women to receive the gift and benefits of salvation (see Ephesians 1:18, page 227; 1 Thessalonians 2:12, page 250;