

An Introduction To The Gospel,  
The Holy Spirit And The Local Church

# START HERE

A 21-Day Guided Devotional

Stephen Martin

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## START HERE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

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## **DEDICATION**

**Linda Schantz**

*Not a day has gone by in 2020 that I haven't missed you. You encouraged me and pushed me to be a better Christian and pastor. You would be so proud of Lindsey Oswald and all the work she did to push this project to completion.*

*There are still a lot of typos and grammatical errors, but we left them there to remind us of you and how even though you are at home with Jesus, there's still the hole you left here.*



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# GETTING STARTED

With everything surrounding us today, it can be hard to know where to start, especially in regard to following Jesus. Start Here is a 21-day guided devotional where you will learn three essentials that form the foundation of the Christian life: The Gospel, The Holy Spirit and The Local Church. You will spend 7 days focusing on each of these essentials as you continue to grow in your faith over time.

Before you start this 21-day guided devotional, here are a few things you need to start doing immediately to prepare you for the journey ahead:

## **1. Start reading the Bible.**

We find God's unconditional love when we open up the Bible and see His plans in written form. As we read the Bible, we see that God's will is to give us an abundance of grace. In His will, we see peace. We see healing. We see His provision for our needs. We see how God's power can work in our lives so we can live as overcomers, and so much more.

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

Hebrews 4:12 NLT

The Bible is where we find out what we've inherited through the person of Jesus Christ. If a rich relative passed away and left you in their will, you would probably go to the reading of the will because you would want to find out what they left you. The Bible is a record of what is in your inheritance as one of God's sons or daughters.

When you begin reading your Bible, here are a few simple tips to help you get the most out of your time.

**First, get a translation you can understand.** King James is a great translation, but because it's written in old English, it may be harder for you to understand. We highly recommend the more modern New King James Version, the English Standard Version, the New Living Translation, or the New International Version of the Bible

**Second, start reading in the books known as “The Gospels”.** Christianity is about following Jesus, so the best place to learn about who Jesus is, is in the Gospels (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) which give an account of Jesus' life and ministry on Earth.

The book of **Matthew** was written to Jewish readers, so it contains a lot of references to the Old Testament prophecies about what Jesus would do when He came so that people would know who to look for as the Messiah. With these references to the Old Testament prophecies, the book of Matthew gives a great perspective on how the Old Testament (the older part of the Bible) is fulfilled in the New Testament (the newer part of the Bible).

The Gospel of **Mark** was written to the Romans, who were a highly action-oriented society, so there is a lot of action in the way this Gospel was written. This book of the Bible gets right to the point. There are many miracles of Jesus packed into this book and it is the shortest,

most concise book of the story of Christ. It also clearly reveals that, even though Jesus was God, He came to Earth as a man to become a servant.

The book of **Luke** was written by a doctor, so you're going to find a lot of details you don't see included in any other gospel. A doctor's eye would catch those details, particularly in the way Jesus performed miracles during His ministry.

The Gospel of **John** was written by a disciple who was believed to be the closest friend of Jesus. John was known as "the beloved," and he called himself, "the one that Christ loved," so you're going to see a lot about relationship in this book. In fact, there are even some stories recorded in the book of John that are only recorded here and don't appear in any other account of the life of Jesus.

When you read all four Gospels and bring them together, they create the complete portrait of who Jesus is.

## **2. Start talking to God.**

Many people are intimidated by the subject of prayer, simply because they don't know what to pray or don't know how to pray. But prayer is simply having a conversation with God.

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

1 Peter 5:7 NLT

Jesus wants to be your best friend, and the thing about best friends is... they talk. They talk often, and they talk a lot. You can talk with God about every part of your life. Nothing is too small for Him. He wants to be a part of your life, just as you would include your best friend in your day-to-day activities.

While you're reading the Bible, pause and take moments to pray over what you read, and ask God how it applies to your life. Then listen for His voice as He speaks to you through His Word.

### **3. Start spending time with other Christians.**

When we look in the book of Acts, the first book after the Gospels, which is a recording of Jesus working with the New Testament Church He created, we see what takes place in the life of new believers.

The local church is an essential part of every growing Christian's life. Church isn't just a place we go; it's a spiritual family we belong to. Each of us is wired by God for spiritual relationships with others in the local church.

**The local church is a place to connect.** In Acts, we see believers in the Early Church connecting to one another in two ways: in the Temple and from house to house. When they gathered in the Temple, it was to hear God's Word and to worship together. This unity created the context of their relationships. Then they would meet together in smaller groups in homes where they could connect and build deeper relationships with one another. Both of these environments are critical to our relationships with one another.

Meeting in the Temple is equivalent to weekly services where we all gather together to worship, learn the Bible, and celebrate what God is doing in our spiritual family as a whole.

Meeting from house to house in our context, is getting together in smaller groups. As the church grows larger, it's so important that we also grow smaller. We do that by connecting with people in small groups.

You stay connected to your local church when you prioritize time for weekly services AND small groups.

...You will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:15 NLT

Some people are critical of large churches. They say, “It’s just too big or I can’t get to know anybody.” Actually, the opposite is true.

The bigger we are when we’re gathered, the more options and opportunities there are for you to find someone like you in a smaller group. The reality is, we tend to connect with people similar to ourselves. (You know, “Birds of a feather flock together.”) The larger a church is, the more options there are to find a person or a family you can connect with relationally who has the same interests, passions, and personality as you.

**The local church is a place to serve.** When you connect with other believers in weekly services and in small groups, you receive or consume. There’s nothing wrong with consuming. Your spiritual intake is an important part of growing in your faith—but it isn’t the only part. The only thing that completely fulfills us is when we find belonging. True belonging happens when we not only consume, but we also contribute.

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

1 Peter 4:10 NLT

You might be thinking, *I don’t have my life together yet, Pastor, or I don’t know enough of the Bible, or I’m not ready to help out in the church.* But, honestly, one of the fastest ways to grow spiritually is to jump in and start serving, even before you feel ready or qualified. The Bible is filled with people who didn’t think they were good enough or ready to do what God was asking them to do. The truth is, none of us are ready. It’s God who works through us. He always equips those whom He calls, and we always grow as we go.

There may be some areas you aren't spiritually ready for yet, but no matter what level of faith you have, there is a place in the local church where you can serve God and make an eternal difference. One of the fastest ways to grow is to jump right in and experience God using you to make a difference in the life of someone else.

***Start Here: An Introduction To The Gospel, The Holy Spirit And The Local Church***, is designed to help you jump-start your faith by getting to know God through His Word, the Bible. Over the next twenty-one days you will learn more about The Gospel, The Holy Spirit, and The Local Church—three vital components of your faith and relationship with God.





# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK IN A GROUP SETTING

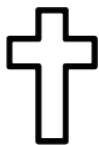
This study was designed to be used alongside a pastor, a spiritual mentor, or in a small group.

To fully apply this content to your life, you need to bring other people along with you. Discipleship and accountability are the keys to making any spiritual discipline become a living part of your faith. As you study the truths contained in *Start Here: An Introduction to The Gospel, The Holy Spirit and The Local Church*, you'll be able to grow and reach your full potential by surrounding yourself with people you can mentor and others who can mentor you.

In the pages following each devotional study, you'll find additional scripture reading, a series of questions for personal reflection, and a journaling area to make this material come alive for you. You may also use these materials to help guide you and your friends in a group discussion about each day's topic by using the questions for reflection as a springboard for discussion.

As you study these deeper concepts personally and with trusted friends, you'll be able to take away the principles that will help you grow on a spiritual foundation that will endure.





## WEEK 1

# THE GOSPEL

*The word “gospel” literally means “good news.”*

The good news is that people who were once separated from God by sin are now forgiven and reconciled to God through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who accept salvation by confessing Jesus as their Lord attain eternal life and the best life now through the finished work of the cross and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is truly good news.



**WEEK 1 • DAY 1**

# **In His Image**

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

Genesis 1:26 NLT



## READ

In order to understand the good news, you need to first understand just how good it is. We have to go back to the beginning to understand the heart of God for humanity. God steps onto the scene, overlooking a formless and lifeless environment. In just six days, He created the heavens and the earth, bringing about a world full of life. There was no death or destruction, no sin or sickness, and Man and Woman walked personally with God because they were made in God's image. This concept is repeated throughout the story of Creation in the book of Genesis because it shows us the very nature of God.

I remember the moment I became a father. On the outside I seemed cool, calm, and collected—but, on the inside, I was a wreck. When the moment came for my oldest child, Adilyn, to be born, I only wanted one thing. I wanted her to be healthy and whole. The birth went faster than expected, and before I knew it, the doctor was handing me my newborn daughter. The moment I looked at her, I knew my whole world had changed. I was shocked by how much she favored my appearance. I couldn't believe how a baby could look so much like an adult. If you are a parent, you know what I'm talking about. In that moment, I knew there was nothing I wouldn't do for that little girl—my own flesh and blood.

God is a parent too. A lot of people picture God as some cosmic kill-joy in the sky who is just looking for a reason to zap them with a lightning bolt, but nothing could be further from the truth. He's a Father who loves His children—not because of anything they did or did not do—but simply because they're His children.

When you look at the story of Creation, you see God placing the man, Adam, in the Garden and walking with him, giving him responsibility and purpose. One day God looked at Adam and desired to give him a helpmate comparable and complementary to him, so God gave him Eve. God is a loving Father, and He loves to see His children happy and whole.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." So the Lord God formed from the ground all the

wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

Genesis 2:18-22 NLT

Our Father God desires a relationship with His children, but as any good father knows, any relationship between a father and his children includes giving his children the greatest gift: the ability to choose him or reject him in their lives.

QUESTIONS

## REFLECT & WRITE

1. Read Genesis 1:26-28. What purpose or instruction did God give for creating mankind?

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2. What comes to mind when you think of God as a parent? How do you relate that idea to your relationship with your parents?

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**WEEK 1 • DAY 2**

# **The Problem of Sin**

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

Romans 5:12 NLT



## READ

I'm not sure if you've looked around the world lately, but something has gone terribly wrong. It only takes a few minutes to watch the headlines in the evening news to see that something is broken. Every election cycle, we anxiously cast our ballots for the next politician who promises to save the world from injustice only to be disappointed as yet another year goes by where things get worse.

As you look around, maybe you've thought to yourself, It isn't supposed to be this way. If you have, you're right—it isn't! This isn't how God intended things to be. The problems we see in our world are all problems that started in the human heart way back in the Garden of Eden.

In the beginning, God made everything perfect. The Earth was pristine, and man was without sin. There was no death, decay, or injustice. God desired a close relationship with us, but He knew the only way we could have a real relationship with Him was to give us the freedom to accept Him or reject Him. God isn't a tyrant; He's a Father.

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

Genesis 2:15–17 NLT

God gave Adam dominion over the Earth and even emphasized Adam's freedom to eat from any tree except the one God knew would hurt him. God gave Adam a choice. When you read this, it's tempting to wonder what the big deal was. After all, it was just a piece of fruit. But the fruit represented something much bigger. It represented man's free will to choose to live apart from God.

As God had warned them, Adam and Eve's choice that day would ultimately result in their physical death, but even worse—it brought spiritual death into man's relationship with God. Our ability to connect with God was changed in an instant when sin entered the Earth.

It's easy to think what would have happened if Adam and Eve hadn't sinned. Maybe you've even thought, If I was there, I wouldn't have sinned. That's easy to say until you really take stock of your life. Each one of us, in our own way, has rejected God at some point in our lives. We've selfishly viewed life as our own and have forgotten our Creator. We've all done and said things we knew were wrong.

They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

Romans 2:15 NLT

Because we are made in God's image, deep inside our hearts, we know right from wrong, but unfortunately, when given half a chance, we usually pick what is wrong. This is why God sent Jesus—to pay the price once and for all for our sin so that we could once again walk with God.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read Genesis 3:7–10. How did Adam and Eve’s relationship with God change after they sinned?

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- 2. Think of a time when you made a mistake or failed. What effect did it have on your relationship(s)?

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## **WEEK 1 • DAY 3**

# **God's Plan**

For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17 NLT



## READ

We all know what resulted from Adam's choice to ignore God's warning: guilt, shame, and blame. And if we're honest, Adam's story is our story too. We trade the freedom God gives us for our own way, and that always leads to less than what God wants for us.

Adam made a choice that we've all made—the choice to walk away from God's perfect way for our own way. But, we will never be fulfilled apart from a relationship with God. Just like what happened with the first man in the Garden, sin separates us from our Creator—the very One who can fulfill the deepest yearnings of our heart—and mankind has been trying to fill that void ever since.

But God had a plan.

For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17 NLT

Jesus is God's solution to man's sin problem—the problem we can't fix on our own, no matter how hard we try.

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT

The penalty of sin that once separated us from God was paid by Jesus. Because of Jesus, we are free. We can be saved from spiritual death and are now free to choose to be reunited again with God and made alive in Christ.

There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12 NLT

Sin no longer separates us from God. Jesus paid the penalty of our sin in the past, present, and future. We simply need to accept, believe, and confess His name to be saved.

QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. How was Adam and Eve’s family affected by sin? What about the effect on our families?

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- 2. How were we separated from God, and what was God’s solution to bring us back into relationship with Him?

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**WEEK 1 • DAY 4**

# **A New You**

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT



## READ

Maybe you've always wondered why Adam and Eve didn't drop dead in the Garden of Eden after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Didn't God say they would surely die if they ate the fruit? Yet, it seems as if Adam and Eve actually lived longer than anyone lives today.

What did God mean when He said they would die? There's a type of death other than physical death, and this kind of death is much worse.

There's an account in John 3 of a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a really good guy. He was a part of the religious elite and had kept the Ten Commandments to the best of his ability throughout his entire life. He had created a life that, on the outside, honored God, but, on the inside, something was still missing and Nicodemus knew it. He could feel it. It was eating away at his soul. He knew there was something more, but he couldn't seem to attain it. Then Nicodemus heard about Jesus and the miracles He performed. Not wanting the other religious leaders to hassle him, Nicodemus went to meet Jesus in the middle of the night. He asked Jesus what He must do to be whole and to fill the void in his life.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

John 3:3 NLT

Nicodemus was confused by Jesus' answer. How could a grown man go back into his mother's womb? He immediately assumed Jesus was talking about natural birth. This was the only world Nicodemus knew. But Jesus wasn't talking about being born again in body, but in the spirit.

When God warned Adam about death in the book of Genesis, He wasn't talking about physical death. There is something far worse than dying physically; it is dying spiritually. The spirit is the part of us that connects us to God.

For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

John 4:24 NLT

The death Adam and Eve suffered when they sinned in the Garden of Eden was immediate spiritual death—the separation of their spirits from God their Creator. Although their bodies didn’t pass away until many years later, the damage was done. Sin entered the world. Their spirits died, and spiritual death was passed down to the whole human race.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read John 1:12–13. What relationship do we have with God when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior?

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- 2. Read 1 John 5:3–5. What is promised to those who love God and have faith in His Word?

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**WEEK 1 • DAY 5**

# **Saved By Grace**

That even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!

Ephesians 2:5 NLT



## READ

When you surrendered your life to Jesus, you were born again—not in flesh and blood, but in your spirit. Your spirit is the part of you that is eternal. It's the part of you God created to commune and fellowship with Him. When you surrendered your life to Jesus, the Bible says that your spirit, which was dead in sin, is now made alive in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Your new spirit connecting you with God results in your freedom from the penalty of sin and gives you the power to live free from its prison.

A lot of people try to be “good” on their own. But how does one define “good”? Most people define what's good by comparing their lives to someone else's. Everyone's life looks good when you compare it to someone who is worse than you.

The Bible defines “good” as GOD. Our Creator sets the standard of what is good and right. By that scale, we all fall short. Very short.

This failure to measure up is at the center of God's plan. God knew we could never reach His standards in our behavior alone. We need Jesus' help. Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sin, and defeated death by raising from the dead. HIS victory over sin and death is OUR victory over sin and death.

What do you have to do to be right with God? How can you ever measure up? To have a right relationship with God, you must surrender your life to Jesus.

### 1. Admit

Admit you need God. If you haven't accepted Christ in your heart, your spirit is dead. (No judgment. That's where we all start from.)

For EVERYONE has sinned; we ALL fall short of  
God's glorious standard.

Romans 3:23 NLT [Author's Emphasis]

We ALL have sinned—not some of us. We all made the same decision Adam made in the Garden of Eden. The decision was to trade God’s best for what we thought was best, which only ended up in us being unfulfilled and striving our entire lives.

## **2. Believe**

Put your faith in God’s plan—Jesus.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full [a life that is better].

John 10:10 NIV [Author’s Paraphrase]

We have to admit where we are without Jesus. We have to believe in the power of the cross and the resurrection, but it’s not enough to just to think about it. We can’t “will” our way into a relationship with Him. We have to do one more thing.

## **3. Confess**

The Bible says you have to SAY what you believe with your mouth. We have to give ownership of our lives to God.

Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9 ESV

God is a perfect gentleman. He’s not going to bully His way into your life. He has to be invited to come in. That’s what confessing your belief is all about. It’s not going through a list of sins you’ve committed throughout your life. Confession is saying out loud that Jesus is your Lord. It’s openly telling Him that you are surrendering control of your life to Him.

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read Ephesians 2:8–9. Is it possible for Christians to save themselves through works? How are we saved?

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- 2. Read Romans 10:9. How can we receive salvation through God’s grace?

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**WEEK 1 • DAY 6**

# **Overcoming The Flesh**

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 NLT



## READ

Maybe you've heard the word "trinity" in connection with God. It means that God has three parts: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is still One God, but He has three distinct parts, each part completing and complementing the other.

The Bible says God created us in His image. We were created in His likeness. In the same way someone may share our likeness—a son, a daughter, a father, or a mother—we also share the likeness of God.

Here's one way that you share God's likeness: God is three parts, and so are you. You were created by God with three parts: a spirit, a soul, and a body.

You are a **spirit**. Remember, your spirit is the eternal part of you that connects with God.

You have a **soul**. This is your mind, your will, and your emotions. Your soul is made up of your "thinker," your "chooser," and your "feeler," to put it simply.

Finally, your spirit and your soul live in a **body**. This is the part of you that interacts with the world through your five senses: What you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell.

Before you were born again, your soul (mind, will, and emotions) and your body taught you how to live. They ruled supreme. But now that you've been born again, you've started a process called "sanctification," where you have to retrain your soul and body to be led by your new, born-again spirit.

Your soul and your body together are often referred to in Scripture as "the flesh." Unfortunately, when you are born again and working on using your spirit to lead you, your flesh doesn't want to just go along peaceably. It puts up a fight!

Your mind and your body (what you want and how you feel) have gotten used to calling the shots in your life, but when your born-again spirit gets put in charge, it sets up a battle inside you that results in

choices: Will you choose the spirit, which gives life, or the flesh, which brings death to the good and righteous things God wants for your life?

The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

**Romans 8:6 NIV**

Many new Christians are surprised to find they continue to struggle with sin even after they've surrendered their lives to Christ. Even mature Christians can still struggle with sinful habits and hang ups.

The Apostle Paul who wrote nearly two-thirds of the New Testament, pioneered new churches, and stood before kings proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, struggled in this battle between his spirit and flesh too. You can read about it in Romans 7.

When you chose the spirit, you deny the flesh. When you chose the flesh, you deny the spirit. The spirit gives life, but the flesh brings death and destruction.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read Galatians 5:19–21. What works of the flesh do we have the power to overcome through our born-again spirits?

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- 2. Read 1 Corinthians 9:25–27. What example did the Apostle Paul give about how we should discipline our flesh?

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**WEEK 1 • DAY 7**

# **How To Know God**

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

2 Timothy 3:16 NLT



## READ

Have you ever wondered what was the right thing to do in a particular situation? Have you ever prayed for something you weren't sure was God's will? Most of the time, when we first start following Jesus, we're unaware or unsure of God's ways, but as we begin to put His Word (the Bible) into our hearts, knowing God's will equips us to win in life.

In Matthew 7, Jesus tells a parable about a wise and a foolish builder. One man built his house on the sand, while the other built his house on a rock. Then a strong storm came along and beat down against both of those houses. The house built on the sand crumbled and fell, while the house built on the rock stood firm because it was built on a solid foundation. Jesus used that story to illustrate how the Bible is the solid foundation for our lives.

The Bible is incredible. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us, and teach us all we need to know in life. The Bible is one big story that tells us who God is.

The Bible was written by **nearly forty different authors** (kings, priests, farmers, lawyers, tax collectors, fishermen, etc.), **over a period of 1,500 years, in three languages, on three continents**. The entire Bible has been translated into 531 languages, and portions of it have been translated into 3,000 different languages! ***Not only is the Bible the best-selling book every year, it's the best-selling book of all-time!***

But that's not all! The printing press was created to make the Bible. The Bible isn't just a great book. No—our modern forms of books exist only because of the Bible. **The Bible is living and active!**

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

Hebrews 4:12 NLT

The Bible changes our perspective, our worldview, and all our assumptions about life. You can't read the Bible without it reading you.

The Bible is your direct connection to the will and character of God. When you understand God's Word, you can learn to hear His voice.

According to 2 Timothy, the Bible is also a weapon. It helps you win the battle for your heart and mind. The Bible becomes the filter for your thoughts and reminds you of who God is and how He works. **It isn't enough to have the Bible in your home, you need to have it in your heart!**

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read John 16:13. In addition to the Bible, who else can guide us to know God’s will better?

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- 2. What does it mean when Paul says that the Bible is a weapon?

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## WEEK 2

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The Holy Spirit empowers us to live the Christian life.*

In Matthew 3:36, just as Jesus was about to begin His ministry on Earth, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him to prepare Him for His work. It was the Holy Spirit who enabled Jesus to perform the many miracles of the Bible, and it was the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. Before He ascended into Heaven, after the resurrection, Jesus instructed His followers to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would lead and guide us into all truth (John 16:13).



## **WEEK 2 • DAY 8**

# **Our Advocate And Helper**

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

John 14:26–27 NLT



## READ

At the conclusion of Jesus' ministry on Earth, Jesus turned to his disciples and told them it was better for Him to leave them to go to the Father and to send them another person to be with them—the Person of the Holy Spirit. This week we will learn about the Holy Spirit and why He is vital to living the Christian life.

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

John 16:7 ESV

Wait, what?! The disciples had walked with Jesus, every day in close proximity for three years. They did life together. They heard Him teach. He coached them, corrected them, and loved them. They watched Him perform miracles.

**Imagine what that must have been like to have Jesus walking alongside you in physical form today.**

- Your back is really bothering you. You blurt out, “Jesus, my back hurts!” Bam! Your back is healed. He could do that!
- Your dog gets run over by a car. You cry out, “Jesus, heal my dog.” Then Spot bounces back to life and runs off! That would be awesome!
- Or, “Jesus, please help me lose ten pounds.” Boom! You have a shredded body!

Jesus in the flesh seems like the best thing ever. **But Jesus told His disciples that isn't better.** He said it was to their advantage that He left and sent the Holy Spirit in His place. But why?!

Imagine the line there would be for everyone on the planet to see Jesus in the flesh! Jesus knew that in order for us to fulfill all that He has called us to do, we would need access to His power with us, in us, and upon us 24/7.

Many people think of the Holy Spirit as a mystical being or some ghostly thing, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Holy Spirit is a person—the third Person of the Trinity—completely God. He is here to help us live the life Jesus called us to live. He is our Advocate and Helper whenever we're in need.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

1. Jesus tells us that it is better that He goes away. How is this true?

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2. Read Acts 1:8. What else does the Holy Spirit help us to do?

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**WEEK 2 • DAY 9**

# **The Holy Spirit Speaks The Truth**

But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth.  
He will come to you from the Father and will testify all  
about me

John 15:26 NLT



## READ

Here we see a two-fold work of the Holy Spirit when it comes to living in truth.

### **FIRST, the Holy Spirit teaches us.**

When Jesus said the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth, that's exactly what He meant. So how does the Holy Spirit do that? Let's examine some of the original language in the Bible to discover how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

Have you ever read the Bible and wondered how it applies to you? There are two Greek words used in Scripture to describe the Bible. They're the words "*logos*" and "*rhema*."

- *Logos* means the written word on the page. When you pick up the Bible, you can learn about God's character and His ways by reading what is said about them.
- The word *rhema* refers to when the Holy Spirit relates a scripture you read directly to your own, personal life. That is when the Bible becomes alive and active for you.

The *rhema* word you get from the Holy Spirit will never contradict the *logos* words you read in the Bible. The two work in perfect unity to help you know God and do His will. The Holy Spirit will teach you how to apply God's Word to your life specifically.

Here's another example of how the Holy Spirit teaches us. God has given teachers and pastors to the church "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). My job as a pastor is to listen to the Holy Spirit's leading and teach God's Word (the *logos*), but you need the Holy Spirit to help you apply it (the *rhema*) to your specific circumstances.

### **SECOND, the Holy Spirit helps us remember.**

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything **AND** will remind you of everything I have told you.

John 14:26 NLT [Author's Emphasis]

This certainly happened with the disciples. Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would bring things to their memory, and He did.

His disciples didn't understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him.

John 12:16 NLT

At first, the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. But later on, after Jesus was raised from the dead the Holy Spirit helped them to understand.

Perhaps you've gone through a troubling time, when you felt overwhelmed, but then a scripture came into your mind that fit your situation perfectly. That's the Holy Spirit bringing to your remembrance the words and ways of God to help and comfort you. The Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus and his work in your life and reminds you of God's Word.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. What are the two ways that the Holy Spirit teaches us? What is the difference between the two?

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- 2. Read Romans 8:26–27. How can the Holy Spirit help us in our weaknesses?

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**WEEK 2 • DAY 10**

# **The Holy Spirit Convicts The World Of Sin**

And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

John 16:8 NLT



## READ

The Bible says the Holy Spirit is dwelling *WITH* all people prior to them having a relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit's presence is convicting them of their sin and convincing them that Jesus Christ is the only answer.

Jesus spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's role in the world. The Holy Spirit is constantly testifying of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come.

In Mark 4, Jesus tells a parable about a farmer who sowed seed into various soils. Depending on the soil, the seed either flourished, withered, or fell away. The seed represents the Word of God and the ways of God. The soil in the parable represents the condition of a person's heart. As Christians, our job is that of the farmer. We sow the Word and the ways of God into the hearts of people, but the Holy Spirit causes the seed to grow and bear fruit.

I often speak to people who have recently surrendered their lives to Jesus. They almost always tell me they can't explain why they were in church that day or why they went to the event where they received Christ as their Lord and Savior. They usually say they just "knew" they needed to be there. To be sure, they were usually invited by a disciple of Jesus, but for some reason they really felt compelled to attend. What caused the feeling or need that brought them to the right place at the right time? It was the Holy Spirit drawing them to Jesus.

God the Father knew you and chose you long ago,  
and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have  
obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of  
Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace  
and peace.

1 Peter 1:2 NLT

The Holy Spirit partners with Christians in spreading the message about Jesus. Our role is to be faithful in sowing the seeds of God's truth and grace and to rely on the Holy Spirit to cause those seeds to grow and bear fruit.

It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

1 Corinthians 3:7 NLT

QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

1. Read John 16:13. What will the Holy Spirit guide you to?

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2. Describe a time when you experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

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**WEEK 2 • DAY 11**

# **The Holy Spirit Works In Us**

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

John 14:16–17 NIV



## READ

When Jesus said those words, He was talking to His disciples about His impending betrayal and death. He had been telling them He was going away and that they could not follow Him right away.

Up until this point, Jesus had always been the Defender of His disciples. The scribes and the pharisees liked to pick on them. The religious leaders were constantly accusing the disciples. “Why do Your disciples eat with unwashed hands?” “Why do Your disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day?” But Jesus countered their accusations and silenced the accusers every time. The disciples were worried about how they would defend themselves if Jesus left the Earth. They knew they couldn’t protect themselves, but Jesus didn’t leave them defenseless.

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another **Helper**, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells **with you** and will be **in you**.

John 14:16–17 NKJV [Author’s Emphasis]

Another translation of the word *Helper* is *Comforter*. It means, One who is called alongside to plead your case; *One who will be here to help and lift you up*. Jesus said the Holy Spirit—their Advocate, Defender, Helper, and Comforter— would not just be *WITH* them, but He would also live *IN* them.

I can sort of understand the gravity of the disciples’ angst when I think back on a personal story.

One time, I was driving on a road through a remote part of Oklahoma known for lots of drug dealers and meth production. I was really low on gas and couldn’t find a station anywhere. To make matters worse, I had no cell phone service, and my GPS wasn’t working. My daughter Adilyn was with me. It was winter, and I was lost. I wasn’t quite sure what we were going to do when the gas tank was empty.

I had just bought the truck I was driving, and then I remembered the car dealer had told me about this button in my car called *ONSTAR*. I didn't pay for it. I got it free for six months, and it hadn't expired yet. BAM! When I pushed that button, and that nice lady sent a sheriff to follow us to a gas station, it was one of the most comforting moments of my life!

When you surrender your life to Jesus, the Holy Spirit—your Advocate, Defender, Helper, and Comforter—comes to dwell inside of you. You don't have to pay a subscription to get God's *ONSTAR*!

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

1 Corinthians 3:16 NLT

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. The Temple was the resting place on Earth for God’s Spirit in the Old Testament. What is the new temple of the Holy Spirit?

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- 2. Read Acts 10:42–46. How else did people receive the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts? Was it obvious to observers that people had received the Holy Spirit?

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**WEEK 2 • DAY 12**

# **The Holy Spirit Works Through Us**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8 NLT



## READ

Have you ever felt as if you lacked confidence in standing up for Christ? Perhaps you're living in a place where you feel a lack of boldness, and even ashamed of Christ at times. Or, maybe you missed a moment to share the Gospel with someone. You're not alone.

Even the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus' three closest friends, missed it. On the toughest day of Jesus' life, Peter denied Christ—not once, not twice, but three times! But fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, Peter shared Christ boldly, and thousands of people were saved (Acts 2:14–41).

How could Peter have been so different? **It wasn't a different Peter; it was a different power.** When the power of the Holy Spirit comes *UPON* you, things change.

All of us receive a measure of the Holy Spirit when we come to Christ (2 Corinthians 1:22). But we also see in Scripture where the early believers were being continually filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 and Acts 4, the same group of people were filled with the Spirit twice.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 4:31 NIV

As we go through life's obstacles, we leak. We need to be recharged regularly. The great news is, when we need a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, His power is available.

### **How to be filled with the Holy Spirit continually:**

**Ask.** You receive the Holy Spirit the same way you receive anything. Ask for the Holy Spirit's presence and His power.

And so I tell you, 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. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Luke 11:9–10 NLT

If you've been filled with the Holy Spirit before, but you want more of God, *now is the time*. If you've never been filled with the Holy Spirit, and you want more love, power, or spiritual gifts operating in your life, *now is the time*. The needs of our world demand that we stay full of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

**Receive.** Everything God gives, has to be received.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...

James 1:17 NIV

Ask, knowing that you will receive. Slow your life, and still your soul so you can receive. Receiving the Holy Spirit's power is not a one-time experience. We receive Jesus once. The Holy Spirit comes *INTO* you one time. But He can come *UPON* you and flow *THROUGH* you multiple times as you need His power.

**Take a risk.** Step out in faith. When the Holy Spirit speaks to you, listen to Him and follow through. If He tells you to call an old friend from high school, call them. If He tells you to reach out to your neighbor who is battling cancer, reach out. If He is challenging you to start a small group at the office, do it.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

1. How are we continually filled with the Holy Spirit?

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2. Read Judges 14:19; Numbers 27:18–19; Judges 3:10. How did God use people with the power of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament?

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**WEEK 2 • DAY 13**

# **The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts**

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 NIV



## READ

The Holy Spirit gives us gifts—and those gifts are good.

My love language is gift giving, anyone who is around me long enough will get a gift for a birthday, anniversary, or just because. Christmas is my favorite time of year because I count it as a challenge to give the people I love good gifts. But no matter what gifts you give or get, the Holy Spirit's gifts are better!

But to each one is given **the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good**. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:7–10 NASB [Author's Emphasis]

God is the one who gives that gifts and scripture gives us clear guidelines about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### 1. **Spiritual gifts are not a sign of spiritual maturity.**

It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 Corinthians 12:11 NLT

### 2. **The topic of spiritual gifts often reveals pride in people.** Some might say:

- *"I have this gift... I must be a mature, special follower of Christ."* OR

- *“Spiritual gifts are not real. People who say they have these gifts lack character... God wouldn’t put His Spirit in a dirty bucket.”*

- 3. We are not to be ignorant about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** For many, talking about the gifts of the Spirit is uncomfortable. They want to avoid controversy and conflict, so they’d rather ignore the subject completely.

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

1 Corinthians 12:1 NIV

- 4. We’re commanded to eagerly desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit.**

Follow the way of love and **eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit**, especially prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:1 NIV [Author’s emphasis]

- 5. Love is the key to the use of the gifts of the Spirit.**

**Follow the way of love** and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:1 NIV [Author’s emphasis]

When you consider how the gifts of the Spirit are supposed to be expressed and how it feels for others to experience them, it will change the way you see things.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4. Why are these gifts given to people who believe and receive them?

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- 2. How are we supposed to use the gifts of the Spirit? Does this change the way you see and seek these gifts?

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**WEEK 2 • DAY 14**

# **The Holy Spirit Bears Fruit**

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Galatians 5:22–23 NLT



## **READ**

The key to becoming more like Jesus is choosing to allow the Holy Spirit to live through you on a daily basis.

We always have two choices: We can walk in the flesh (being controlled by our souls and bodies), or we can walk in the power of the Holy Spirit that cooperates with our born-again spirit.

In fact, Jesus said, bearing good fruit (the fruit of the Spirit) is a key indicator of whether we are just falsely religious or we are people who are true followers of Jesus.

Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act....

**Matthew 7:15–16 NLT**

Whatever you feed will grow. If you feed the flesh and ignore the spirit, the result is disastrous.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

**Galatians 5:19-21 NLT**

If you starve the flesh and invite the Holy Spirit to continue His work in you, you will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Galatians.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Galatians 5:22-23 NLT

God is so good. He always gives us a choice. Let's choose to allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in our lives.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read Romans 8:6–10. What is the mindset of the flesh? What is promised to those who have their minds set on the desires of the Spirit?

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- 2. Read Galatians 5:22–26. What is the fruit of the Spirit, and what is the promise for those who follow the Spirit of God?

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## WEEK 3

# THE LOCAL CHURCH

*The local church is a critical part of you becoming who God made you to be in Christ.*

Your faith is deeply personal, but we see in Scripture that it is not private. You were made for relationship, and it's vital that you take your place in the family of God expressed in your local church. Church is more than a building or an activity; it's a community where God forms and shapes you as you grow alongside others who are committed to your spiritual growth.



**WEEK 3 • DAY 15**

# **Sons & Daughters**

And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons  
and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:18 NLT



## READ

Names are powerful. For better or worse, our names identify and shape us. Our heritage defines where we came from and frames our future. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been identified by sin, death, and decay. We've been given false identities by others, by ourselves, and by our enemy, the devil. Names and labels cause us to second guess who we really are and what we're really capable of. They carry shadows of guilt, shame, and regret.

But in Christ, God gives us a new name and identity. That identity is found back in the first pages of Scripture when we walked with God in the Garden and were created in His image. Being the image-bearers of the Creator is our true identity, and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, we have been renamed sons and daughters of Almighty God.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he  
gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12 NLT

As a son or daughter of God, we now reflect our Heavenly Father. When God looks upon those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, He no longer sees rebels or enemies, He sees His children.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry on Earth—before He had done any miracles, before He was well known and had accolades to His name—immediately following His baptism, this is what God boomed from the heavens down on His Son:

...“This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great  
joy.”

Matthew 3:17 NLT

Because of what Jesus did, we don't have to wonder if God is happy with us or if He believes in us. When the Father sees you and me, He sees His dearly loved Son, Jesus. The grace poured out on us through

Christ’s work on the Cross allows us to grow closer to our Heavenly Father and to take our place in the family of God.

QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1–2. Who are we to God? What does this mean to you?

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- 2. How does God’s view of us as sons and daughters differ from how many people think of God?

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**WEEK 3 • DAY 16**

# **Jesus Builds His Church**

Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

Matthew 16:18 NLT



## READ

In Matthew 16, Jesus took His disciples into a region that had a reputation of being the most wicked and lost city on Earth, Caesarea Philippi. It was here that Jesus asked His disciples the most important question He had ever asked them, “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter spoke up and answered, “You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God.”

At that moment Jesus commended Peter and declared that on that truth—the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah—Jesus would build His Church. The reality that Jesus is the Savior of the world is the rock upon which everything in our faith is built, especially Jesus’ Church.

Many think church is a place you go to or an hour-long event on Sunday, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Church is more than a place or an event. It’s people gathered together around the shared reality that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. This revelation unites us into a spiritual family.

The Church is a powerful force where God’s power is displayed in us and flows through us into the world. When we first surrender our lives to Christ, we quickly find out that we have much to learn. The local church is where we begin to receive the revelation we need to be the powerful force God intended for us to become.

Jesus Himself promises to build His Church. He assures us that nothing will be able to conquer it. In the context of Him saying this, the Jewish people had been conquered by the Romans. The disciples (Jewish believers) were staring at the Roman seat of wickedness at Caesarea Philippi, and it was there that Jesus made this declaration, which would have been thought absurd at the time.

But today, after two thousand years have passed, when shopping for groceries in Walmart, I have yet to bump into an ancient Roman. I have, however, bumped into many Christians and have shared fellowship with them in this thing called the Church that has not passed away nor ever will.

Jesus never promised to build my life or to contribute to my retirement plan account in Scripture, but He did promise to build His Church. As I stay planted in it, I will surely flourish.

QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

1. Read Mark 16:14–16. What did Jesus tell His disciples first?

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Now read Matthew 28:16–20. What did Jesus tell the disciples to do next?

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2. Read Acts 1:8. What did Jesus tell His disciples that they would need in order to do the work of building His Church?

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**WEEK 3 • DAY 17**

## **A Spiritual Family**

He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 12:48–50 NIV



## READ

Early in Jesus' ministry, there was a period of time when His own family didn't believe He was the Messiah. Eventually they would all follow Him, including his half-brother James, who believed after Jesus appeared to him following His resurrection from the dead. James went on to lead the church at Jerusalem, but at the time when Matthew 12 took place, Jesus' family members found it difficult to believe that Jesus, the oldest son in the family, a carpenter by trade, could be the Son of God.

In Matthew 12, Jesus' mother and brothers called for Him to come out to them, refusing to go inside the place where He was ministering. When Jesus' disciples told Him this, Jesus did something surprising.

As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak to you." Jesus asked, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!"

Matthew 12:46-50 NLT

Instead of acknowledging or rebuking their unbelief, Jesus looked at the people sitting around Him and gave a new definition to spiritual family.

Here's how the Apostle Paul described this family:

You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting

you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

#### **Ephesians 2:19–22 MSG**

God places you in spiritual family—a place where spirit is thicker than blood—a place where He makes His home in the work He is doing in us together.

## **QUESTIONS**

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Does it surprise you that Jesus’ own family initially didn’t believe He was the Messiah? Why, or why not?

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- 2. Read John 13:34–35. How does Jesus say people will be able to tell we’re His disciples?

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**WEEK 3 • DAY 18**

# **One Body, Many Parts**

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27 NLT



## READ

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul uses how our physical body's function as a metaphor for how we work together in the Church. He was writing to a local church in Corinth that was struggling to get along and understand how their individual gifts worked together in spiritual family.

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This

makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 NLT

When you think about the human body, it is fitting that Paul uses this illustration. In it, we can see that, regardless of complexity and function, in order for the body to operate like it's supposed to, the individual parts must all work together. Paul emphasizes that, even though every body part is different and unique, they're all valuable and needed. The big idea is that we all need each other—the Body of Christ (the Church) needs every part to function together.

I've dedicated my life to serving in the local church, and I have seen the importance of understanding two things: You need the body, and the body needs you.

You will never be all you were created to be and do everything God has called you to do apart from the family of God. It isn't enough to just show up on Sunday morning. You need to accept your part in what God is building through your local church family.

Every part's contribution is important. In fact, it's often the smaller, unseen body parts that make the biggest difference. If you're a hand, you won't last long separated from the body, and the body will have a hard time taking hold of things without you. Beware of comparing what you have to offer and your part with someone else's. Each person is unique, and what they offer to the Body of Christ cannot be replaced. We must value each other's parts to play because when we all are connected to the body and functioning in our places, the whole body is better.

## QUESTIONS

**REFLECT & WRITE**

- 1. Read Romans 12:4–8. How are we to work together? What are we given from God individually and corporately?

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- 2. Read 1 Peter 2:4–5. As individuals who are part of the body of Christ, what are we building toward?

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**WEEK 3 • DAY 19**

# **Church Leadership**

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11–12 NLT



## **READ**

Jesus himself promised to build His Church, and He promised that nothing would prevail against it. He also gave specific gifts to the leadership of His Church. The leaders who have been given these gifts are to use them to equip those in the church so that they can accomplish His work on Earth. All leadership in the church is delegated by Jesus to the church leaders.

Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.

**Colossians 1:18 NLT**

In giving these five ministry gifts to His Church, Jesus shows that the best church leadership is a team. No one person has the entire skill set needed to lead God's people, except Jesus. Jesus operated in every one of the five church leadership gifts during his earthly ministry. The people who are given these ministry gifts to lead are unique to each local church family.

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.

**Matthew 5:14 NLT**

Jesus' description of our impact in the world is that of a city on the top of a hill. A city is made up of many families. Each one is unique and different, yet they are all still a part of the city. It is important to understand that spiritual unity isn't simply conformity. Christ is the Head of us all, even though each family and their church leadership may look and operate differently. We are still called to remember and honor our church leadership in a spirit of unity.

Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.

Hebrews 13:7 NLT

In the world today, we have little respect for leaders, but this is not how the family of God should operate. We are called to honor and respect those in authority in the same way that we honor and respect Christ. Christ Himself gave us our local church leaders to watch over us and protect us. We are instructed not to make it difficult for them to fulfill their call to lead us and the local church.

**QUESTIONS**

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read 1 Timothy 3:1–13. What are some of the qualifications of church leaders?

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- 2. Read James 3:1–10. What warning does James give to those who aspire to teach God’s Word? What are we all warned to guard against?

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**WEEK 3 • DAY 20**

# **Gathered & Scattered**

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

Acts 2:42 NLT



## READ

Here we see that the foundation of the Early Church was devotion. It wasn't just a gathering at an event. The members of the Early Church were devoted to one another. As a result of their devotion, they stayed together and under the covering of their leaders, the apostles. The Early Christians were committed to making time to have meals together and sharing what God was doing in their lives. It was because of their unity that God was able to do incredible things in them and through them.

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper[a]), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

Acts 2:42-44 NLT

Generosity marked the Early Church, just as it should mark us. As we stay devoted to one another in spiritual family, we create a bond that's thicker than blood—a bond made possible by the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. The Early Christians were generous and offered their time, talents, abilities, and their financial resources to meet the needs of their spiritual family. They continued to remain unified because they continually met together both in large and small groups.

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47 NLT

There are a lot of things competing for your time and devotion. At the top of that list, it is critical that you stay committed to your spiritual

family. When we gather together during weekly services collectively, we hear the Word of God for our families, and when we gather in smaller groups, we build close, supportive relationships that far outweigh any natural bonds. It is in these environments that we are built up together in what God is building on Earth—His Church.

QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read Acts 2:42–47. From the Early Church’s example, how are we to interact as fellow Christians?

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- 2. What things do you allow to compete for your devotion? How can you take steps to reorder your priorities?

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### **WEEK 3 • DAY 21**

## **Overcoming Offense**

If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

Matthew 18:15–17 NLT



## READ

It's easy to say you're family, until you encounter a situation that makes it difficult to act like it. One of the great things about family is that no matter what happens, and no matter who messes up, you're still part of the family. But how do you navigate the inevitable setbacks of walking with others who, like yourself, still struggle to overcome sin?

Jesus knew we would face this, and He gave us very specific instructions to help us overcome offense and to grow through our issues with one another. It isn't complicated, but your failure to do it God's way will sabotage your faith and the relationships with those whom God has brought into your life to help you grow.

When you find yourself in conflict with someone else, **approach the situation with the heart of a peacemaker.**

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18 NLT

Many times, we can completely avoid misunderstandings simply by having a good attitude and believing the best about others. We step on toes and create problems when we insist on our way and aren't tactful in our interactions with other people.

Still, for the times when conflict does occur, Jesus shows us a simple and effective way to deal with it. It's easy to want to hide from conflict, but it's important to remember that time does not heal issues; only actions will. Don't ignore an offense. Whether you caused it, or it was committed against you, you have a responsibility to address it directly.

**To overcome offense, here are some steps you should take:**

- 1. Go directly to the person with whom the conflict exists.**  
Processing our offenses with others usually only turns into gossip. It is sinful to speak about someone else when they are not present.

2. **Give yourself some time to calm down, and don't react out of anger.** The Bible says our anger will only cause more problems (Proverbs 22:24–25).
3. **Go to the other person privately in an attitude of peace** (Matthew 18:15).
4. **If the person refuses to repent, involve some other trusted brothers or sisters in the church.** Remember the goal isn't an intervention, it is peace. Have the right attitude to make it right (Matthew 18:16).
5. **Finally, if your efforts have failed, involve the church leadership.** Go to your pastor or your leader, and ask them to help you. Honor what they have to say, and value their perspective, as they're responsible to shepherd you through this issue. If the church leadership deems it appropriate, they'll take action to make it right or intervene with church discipline measures (Matthew 18:17).

Remember, 99% of all conflict can be resolved by following these steps. Don't gossip and make something grow out of control. Do the right thing, even if it's hard, and watch God bless you with great relationships as you grow closer to Him in Christ.

## QUESTIONS

# REFLECT & WRITE

- 1. Read Matthew 18:15–17. What is the biblical process for dealing with a believer who has sinned against you or offended you?

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- 2. Read Matthew 6:14–15. If we don't keep an attitude of forgiveness toward our brothers, what will the result be?

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## **A PRAYER FOR SALVATION**

Jesus,

I need You. I am tired of living my way, and I want to choose Your way. Please help me. I invite You into my life to be my Lord and Savior. I believe what the Bible says about You is true. You are God. You came from Heaven to Earth. You lived a perfect life, and You died on the cross to forgive my sin, my failures, and my mistakes. I believe that three days after You were crucified, You rose from the dead and defeated death forever. I put my hope and trust in Your resurrection power. Come into my heart, and be my Lord and Savior. Change my life with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Thank You for meeting me where I am and for showing me a better way to live.

Amen.



## **CONCLUSION**

# **What's Next?**

This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Ephesians 4:13 NLT

## READ

Remember that the Christian life is not a sprint, it's a marathon. The process of becoming more and more like Jesus is a process that not only takes time but it will take your whole life. The exciting thing about following God is he not only saves us by His grace but he also has great things in store for us as we continue to grow over time.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:8-15 NLT

As we wrap up this 21-day devotional, it is important that you continue to take steps that have a purpose in God's plan for you.

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT

As you continue to run your race, it is important that you do three things:

1. **Be Water Baptized.** Jesus commanded that you be baptized and he actually led by being baptized himself. We identify with Christ as we follow in his ways, starting with baptism, obedient to the will of the Father.

The Symbols are as such; we go under the water as Jesus went into the grave. Then, coming up out of the water we are identified with the resurrection of Jesus for our salvation and our new life empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was raised from the dead, we are raised from our former dead-life.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

#### Romans 6:3-4 NIV

We are identifying ourselves with Him in a mighty way when we are baptized. Altogether, baptism identifies a believer with Jesus, with the Christian life and with the local church.

2. **Get Planted into a Local Church.** The moment you were born again, you are a son or daughter of God but you are also born again into God's family, the church. It is in this context that churches have formed around the world for thousands of years. It is in the local church that you are invited to connect, equipped to serve, challenged to grow and empowered to lead in everyday life. This is seen in the book of Ephesians chapter 4. Remember, no church is perfect. They are full of people just like you who are still working out their faith and are at various stages of spiritual growth. Jesus himself empowers leaders in the church with gifts meant to encourage and equip you for everything God has planned for your life. Don't be isolated, commit to a spiritual family and allow yourself time to grow in the context of relationships with other Christians.
3. **Continue Growing.** It can be tempting to think that with time and knowledge, you are all grown up. The truth is that every one of us will continue to grow throughout our lifetime as we stay connected to Christ and to his body, the local church. Even the Apostle Paul who planted churches and wrote much of the New

Testament understood that his growth was continuing and never static.

No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Philippians 3:13-14 NLT

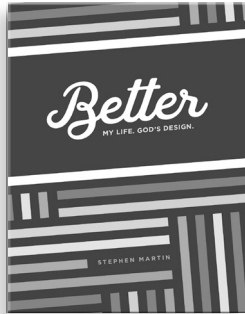
God has incredible plans for you and I pray that you will use what you've learned the last 21 days as a launching pad of spiritual growth and that you will produce fruit consistent with someone who has truly been saved by grace, empowered by the Holy Spirit and growing in spiritual family.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Galatians 5:22-23 NLT



## OTHER RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



### ***Better: My Life. God's Design.***

by Stephen Martin

#### **We want “better,” and we want it now.**

Americans spend billions of dollars every year in our efforts to get better. We want to be better today than we were yesterday and better tomorrow than we are today. We want next year to be better than last.

We’re worried that we’re not good enough and, no matter how hard we try, we can never measure up to everyone’s expectations. We want to be better people, better friends, better husbands or wives, better parents. We want “better,” and we want it now.

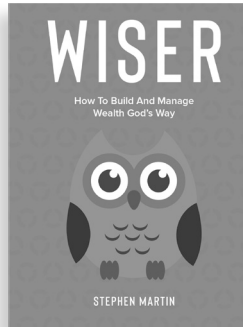
But what if the key to “better” isn’t what we think it is? What if it doesn’t start with us at all?

#### **What if our concept of “better” isn’t good enough?**

With its essential life-application principles and in-depth personal and group study materials, ***Better: My Life. God's Design.*** by Stephen Martin is designed to help you learn the keys to “better” and discover that, with God’s help, the better life you want is within your reach.

Order your copy of the book ***Better: My Life. God's Design.*** wherever books are sold.

## OTHER RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



### ***Wiser: How To Build And Manage Wealth God's Way***

by Stephen Martin

#### **Richer. Winner. Owner. Wealthier. Happier.**

Whenever we think about our finances, those are some of the words that usually come to mind. If you want to be a winner in this world, you need to have a big house, a big car, and a big paycheck. Right? Everyone thinks that having more money and owning more stuff naturally makes you happier in life.

#### **But what if everyone is wrong?**

What if happiness isn't really tied to the number of things you possess, the size of your bank account, or what you can claim ownership over in this life? What if the key to becoming happier with our personal finances and possessions was found in just one word? Wiser.

Building wealth and leaving a legacy that makes a real impact in this world isn't just about becoming richer. It's about becoming WISER. It's about understanding four important biblical principles and applying them practically in our lives. As we learn and practice the four foundational truths presented in this book, we'll discover that building and stewarding our resources God's way will bring us true and lasting wealth..

Order your copy of the book ***Wiser: How To Build And Manage Wealth God's Way*** wherever books are sold.

## OTHER RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



The **Better Planner™** is a thirteen-week personal planner designed to help you map out all the different aspects of success and personal growth on your way to better.

It can get complicated to make sure you're doing all the right things in all the right areas of life, but the **Better Planner™** cuts through all the confusing apps and habit trackers, and puts the path to personal development right into the palm of your hands.

The **Better Planner™** is radically different in its approach. By incorporating the seven biblical principles found in the book **Better: My Life. God's Design.** into one easy-to-use, thirteen-week planner, the **Better Planner™** provides a framework for you to achieve success and follow God's plan for your life.

The foundation of the **Better Planner™** is the practice of defining and reaching your personal vision. The other principles for growth all integrate with and flow out of this essential step.

As you develop and record the insights you receive from God and His design for your life, the **Better Planner™** will lead you through a step-by-step process to become better.

To start your journey to better, order your copy of the **Better Planner™** at [betterplanner.com](http://betterplanner.com) today!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stephen Martin has been in ministry, serving the local church for more than twenty years. Born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Stephen began serving in ministry as a teenager, and then as an intern at his hometown church, Church On The Move. He went on to help with a local church plant and earn a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies from Lindenwood University in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Stephen is passionate about serving and resourcing the local church—specifically church leaders. In 2009, he started One Church Resource, a global, online, sharing network for pastors, church leaders, and creatives.

In 2013, Stephen and his family moved to Texas and planted Vintage Church just outside of Fort Hood, the largest military base in the United States. Today, Vintage Church is a church of thousands and continues to make a significant impact in the Central Texas region. As the founder and Senior Pastor of this vibrant, growing congregation, Stephen firmly believes in its mission of *Reaching People and Building Family*. He is dedicated to helping others take steps to grow into their God-given potential.

When he's not pastoring people or coaching leaders, Stephen loves spending time with his family, hunting deer, and reading. Stephen's wife, Kyla, is a Family Medicine Physician, and they have two beautiful daughters, Adilyn and Breelyn, and two sons, Greyson and Colton.

