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**CHANGED**  
A Four-Week Discussion on Living a Changed Life.

**CHANGED IDENTITY** CREATES A  
**CHANGED LIFE**



## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE NOW THAT I'M A CHRISTIAN?

### 2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!

What's the most significant thing you've ever changed in your life? Was it a habit you broke? A new discipline you acquired? Weight that you lost? A new job? Becoming a parent? A new address? What's the most significant thing that you've ever changed about you?

If you've ever made a significant change then you know it's no easy task. Even the most disciplined people can struggle to adapt to a change and make it stick.

For those who begin a new relationship with Christ, a significant change has occurred.

### A decision to follow Christ changes everything.

It's a one time change that leads to a lifetime of changes. It's not just a physical, emotional, or spiritual change. It's an everything change.

### Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Those who choose to follow Christ begin a process of continually being changed into the image of Christ. Whether you are at the starting line of your faith, or a ways down the road, your identity is now in Christ. He has made you new and will continue His work in you from this day forward.

# WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT ME TO DO TO EARN HIS APPROVAL?

**When you placed your trust in Jesus, your identity was Changed. You are now God's son or daughter - a Christian.**

As you follow Christ daily you will experience a radical change that will begin today and continue on for the rest of your life.

## **Romans 11:6**

And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Remember your first job? There's nothing quite like the feeling of holding your very first paycheck from the hard work you accomplished. That first paycheck was more than just an exchange of money for services. It was a sign that your work carried value to others around you.

The feeling you first had the moment you took hold of the money was incredible, but do you even remember what you bought with it? Most of us will forget how we spent it, but rarely do we forget how we earned it.

In a culture where hard work is rewarded, it's easy to allow the idea of earning through our efforts to become a filter for our faith. Christianity is unique from our culture, as well as other faith traditions, in that, you do not, and cannot, earn your salvation.

Unlike a paycheck you earn, your new identity in Christ was not given to you because you earned it. Your new identity is actually a gift from God. The Bible says it's a free gift given by God to replace the old identity we used to carry.

It's not uncommon for people to believe that what makes them a Christian is their good works. Most people have a list of "Christian duties" such as: church attendance, moral living, and giving to the poor that they think defines them as a Christian. However, the Bible says that going to God and trying to earn our salvation with our "good deeds" is like presenting "filthy rags" to Him (Isaiah 64:6).

Our new identity is a free gift given to us by God when we accept Christ as our savior and the leader of our life. There was nothing you needed to do other than receive God's free gift of Salvation through His son Jesus. Do our behaviors change? Absolutely, but our behaviors aren't what earn the gift of salvation and our new identity in Christ.

### **Romans 5:15-17**

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in the life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

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Express your faith!



# WHY DOES THE BIBLE WANT ME TO DO “GOOD THINGS” IF IT’S NOT WHAT MATTERS MOST?

So, what does God expect you to do to earn His approval? Nothing. You are approved by God because He has approved His Son's death for you. You are approved by God through the gift of Jesus. There is nothing you can do to cause God to love you more or love you less. God loves you because He has chosen to love you through His limitless grace and mercy.

Sometimes, Christians get a bad reputation in the world because so many people claim to be a Christ follower, but their lives fail to live up to what the Bible says a Christian is to be about.

Imagine talking with a friend who recently got married. As you're talking, you notice they aren't wearing their wedding ring. When you ask them about it, this is their response:

“We both know we are married, we both know who we are married to, and, after, all isn't the most important thing that we each know deep down how much we love one another?”

In fact, we actually prefer to live our lives a lot like we did before we were even together. I still have my place I live at and they have theirs. I do my thing with my friends and they do theirs. Plus, it gives us the chance to be who we were before we got married and still see other people if we want.

The best part is, if I ever feel lonely, or need help, or just want to show people I am married, I just reach out when I need them and they're right there. I think, as long as we're both okay with it, and it works for us, does it really matter if nothing changes just because I got married?”

If you are married you're probably screaming in your head, **“YES IT MATTERS!”**.

The same is true with us and Christ. It matters that our actions, attitudes, and lives display who it is that we've given our lives to.

### 1 John 1:5-7

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Our obedience to the commandments and examples Jesus gave are critical because it shows who we belong to. In the same way that our lives change after we enter into marriage, so too does our life change after we choose to follow Christ.

Christians live, love, and lead differently as a response to this new life in Christ. It doesn't happen all at once, but it happens. Don't think of the grace and freedom in Christ as a get out of jail free card. Instead, see it as an incredible role of responsibility.

**Because we understand how deeply we are loved, we love as deeply as we can.**

As Christians, the good things we do come from the understanding of the great thing done for us. God wants our lives to be lived in light of what Christ has done for us. Because we grasp how immense God's grace is for us, we extend immense grace towards others. Because God's kindness and generosity are clear to us, we live out incredible kindness and generosity to others. Our identity is made clear through our actions.

We can never earn what God has already done for us, but we can imitate it through our daily lives.

### 1 Corinthians 11:1

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

# IS IT NORMAL TO FEEL LIKE I'LL NEVER MEASURE UP?

When Jason and Kelly knew that God was leading them to adopt a child, those around them were not surprised. However, what fascinated their friends and family was that God was leading them to adopt a little boy from Ethiopia. It was a long and complicated process, but after getting past all the hoops and hurdles they were finally able to bring their little boy home. Jason and Kelly changed his name from Obsi to Judson Stewart. Judson was the name of their church; a church that inspired the Stewarts to show Christ's love to orphans around the world. From that day forward Judson was and will always be a Stewart. A new name. A new family. A new identity.

**Adoption is the clearest picture that we have of our relationship with God. We were once orphaned from God's family, but He changed that through Christ.**

## **Ephesians 1:5**

He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

If you were to ask Jason and Kelly, they would tell you that Judson was always, and will always be, a Stewart. He did not need to prove himself or earn the last name. It was given to him as a free gift and along with it all the benefits, rights, privileges, and standings that belong to their other three children. Judson is not a second class member of their family, but a full-fledged Stewart.

When you were adopted by God through Jesus Christ you became a full-fledged member of the family of God. Along with it came every gift, freedom, benefit, and right. You don't need to measure up any more than an already adopted child needs to earn a place in the family—your last name has permanently been changed to Christian. You are a child of God.

Too often, believers buy into the lie that even though they have received Christ there is still more work they have to do in order for God to really value, love, or use them in His kingdom. This couldn't be further from the truth.



**God sees you as His adopted child.**

#### **Galatians 4:6-7**

Because you are in his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

So, for those who think that God is waiting on them to reach a certain level of Christianity prior to really accepting them, or for those who think God only uses those who are strong believers, don't buy into this trap.

God is not measuring you like a child hoping to go on a ride at Disneyland. He is not comparing you to any other child of His.

# HOW DO I LIVE OUT A CHANGED LIFE?

Change often comes with a mix of excitement and anxiety. Remember your first day of high school, the first date you ever went on, or the first day of a new job?

All of these come with anticipation of the good things to come; but they also come with a lot of anxiety, as well. Will I fit in? Will I do a good enough job? Will I make a mistake? Will I be accepted?

These feelings can also exist for new believers in Christ. Sometimes it can feel like everyone else around you knows what they're doing, what to say, and how they're supposed to act. As you are beginning this journey of faith your new life in Christ will look different, but it's not as complicated as you may think. Jesus gave us three clear things to do as we follow Him.

## **Matthew 22:37-38**

Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.

1

Love God. A religious teacher once asked Jesus, what's the most important command God gives? Jesus responded to him like this...

Jesus said the most important thing for people to do is to live out a visible, distinguishable, evident love for God. We do this through a shift in priority. Instead of making decisions with ourselves as the primary focus, we must seek to put God as the primary focus for our lives.

There's no silver bullet approach to this. The truth is that it takes a regular, conscious effort to live with God as our first priority. Some practical ways to create this habit can be:

- Devoting a few minutes each day to prayer and scripture reading.
- Prioritizing relationships with people who value God the way you want to.
- Connect to a Group.
- Making an intentional shift in the media you consume.
- Sharing your faith story with others.

## **Matthew 22:39**

And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

2

Love others. Jesus followed up the greatest commandment with a second one of equal importance.

One of the best ways we can live out our changed identity is through the way we now view the people around us. When we place the same value on others as God does on us, it changes the way we treat people.

The way we interact with our family, friends, and neighbors cannot remain the same, because now we see them in light of God's love.

**We now look for opportunities to demonstrate love for one another, because we recognize the love that God has for us.**

### 1 John 4:11-12

Dear friends, since God loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Viewing others in this way is not natural, but it's what Changed people do. To grow in this area, pray a simple prayer to God that goes like this:

"God, help me to see people the way you see people. Help me to love people the way you love people."

If you're willing to pray this bold prayer, God will continue to show you how to love even the most difficult of people.

3

Make disciples. At CCV it is our mission to WIN people to Christ, TRAIN believers to become disciples, and SEND disciples to impact the world.

Many Christians will scour stores or websites looking for the perfect Bible study or the latest inspirational book to become the faith building tool they believe they need to really thrive in their Christianity. But we're going to let you in on a little known secret, the number one faith building tool ever created was shared over two-thousand years ago.

### Matthew 28:18b-20

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

That's right, going and sharing Jesus Christ with others and making disciples is the greatest way to grow in your relationship with Christ. Now some of you may be thinking, "Oh, there's no way I could do that. I'm still new at this...what if I mess it up or don't know how to answer a question someone has?"

If those are the thoughts racing through your mind right now, let's take a look at what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20.

First, He's given us authority, but not just any authority. He's given us "all authority in heaven and on earth". In other words, you are now the message bearer because you carry in you the very presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

Next, Jesus gave us an assignment when He said, "go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit". In other words, Jesus said that not only is He giving us the authority we need, but the instructions as well. We are the ones tasked with carrying out this mission.

Finally, Jesus said, "And be sure of this: I am with you always. . .". Jesus reminded His disciples that we are not just given authority and an assignment and then left alone. No, Jesus gives us authority, an assignment, and also His presence.

As you go and share your faith story of what God has done in your life you will experience incredible things. You will thrive in your journey as a Christ follower as God answers your prayers to share Him with others. You will expand your knowledge and love of God's word as it becomes the source of truth to your words, prayers, and the wisdom you share.

**When we seek to love God, love others, and make disciples, we are living out the Changed life God intends for us to live.**

## DISCUSS THIS

- What does it mean to you to know that your identity has been changed through Jesus?
- What are you excited to see God change in your life?
- What difference does it make to know that your identity in Christ is not dependent on your “good works”?
- What challenges do you anticipate in living out a changed life?

## DO THIS

- Look up 1 Peter 2:9 and write down on a 3x5 card who you are in Christ based on this passage.
- Look up Ephesians 2:10 and write down on a 3x5 card who you are AND why you are given new life?
- Tape these cards and scriptures in a place you will see them regularly.
- List the expectations you have of yourself now that you are a follower of Jesus. What old habits and practices would you like to change in order to bring honor to Jesus’ reputation?

## Ephesians 2:8-9

**Not by works, so that no one can boast.**

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## AM I ACTUALLY TALKING TO GOD WHEN I PRAY?

Communication is the foundation of every relationship. We need to express our needs, build friendships, ask questions, gain wisdom, and explain ourselves to other people. That's true with God, as well. If we want to have a meaningful relationship with God, we need to learn how to talk to Him.

That may sound strange or intimidating. However, God invited us to talk with Him. Jesus put it this way, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8). This is a promise!

**More than that, God created each of us with an instinct to pray. You were designed to talk with God.**

With coaching and practice anyone can become proficient in prayer. Even Jesus' disciples came and asked Him to teach them to pray. So He gave them a model prayer that we now call, "The Lord's Prayer":

### **Matthew 6:9-13**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

In this lesson, we want to provide some clear steps to become proficient in prayer at three levels: Personal prayer, praying with your children, and prayer with your spouse.



# CAN I LEARN TO PRAY BETTER?

While there are dozens of training tips for prayer, here is one of the most effective and simple, called the P.R.A.Y. method. Each letter of PRAY represents an important aspect of prayer.

**P**

## **Stands for Praise**

This is simply bragging about God. We can say things like: God you are powerful, creative, just, and loving. Or you could brag about what God actually did: God you parted the Red sea, created the world, and gave your Son to die for our sins. Adoration is the best place to start your prayers because when you recognize who God is and what He's done, that will alter what you ask for later in your prayers. When you recognize God on His throne in your heart you ask for different and more noble things, God loves our praise. This should not come as a surprise since we are all made in His image and all of us love it when people compliment us for who we are and what we accomplish. So tell God the very things you would enjoy people telling you.

**R**

## **Stands for Repent**

By adoring God and praising God, we recognize who He is. By repenting of our sins we recognize who we are in the presence of a Holy God. Repent is an odd word for most, but it simply means to acknowledge your sins or mistakes and make a 180 degree turn from them. Confess to God what you struggle with, what habits you want to break, and your fears and failures. This is not a shaming exercise; it is liberating. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God already knows your failures and He still loves you. Jesus already died for that sin so you don't have to beat yourself up. However, every great relationship requires transparency. Confession increases connection with God and freedom for your spirit.

**A**

## **Stands for Ask**

God wants us to come to Him with the things that are on our hearts and minds. Doing this allows us to recognize God as the provider, healer, and savior of every aspect of our life.

### **Philippians 4:6**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

As we make these requests and ask God for His provision, we need to do so with thanksgiving in our heart and even acknowledge that it is only by God that these requests might be satisfied.

There is no problem asking God for whatever you need or even what you want. God wants us to ask Him for His help because He finds great pleasure in doing things for His people.

### **Hebrews 4:16**

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

The invitation is from Jesus himself.

### **John 14:14**

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Once we know who God is on His throne and who we are in His presence and what He has already done for us (adoration, thanksgiving and confession) our requests become richer, deeper, and more meaningful in developing a relationship with God.



### **Stands for Yield**

Ultimately, our heart and attitude in our prayers should end in recognizing God's position as God and our position as servant. When we make requests and ask God for the things on our hearts, it's critical to affirm His place on the throne of our lives by simply recognizing God as King over our lives and all that happens.

### **1 Peter 3:15**

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. . .

Even when Jesus taught the disciples to pray, He taught them to end their prayers by simply saying, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus was teaching us that it is key to positioning our hearts in alignment with God’s will.

#### **Matthew 6:9-10**

This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

When we recognize God as in control of our life, the world around us, and acknowledge that His plans, purpose, and will are far greater than our own we have the right alignment in our hearts. Being in alignment with God allows us to live a Christ centered life that brings about incredible change and impact.



# HOW DO I PRAY IN FRONT OF OTHERS?

Praying in a large or even small group setting when you are new to the concept of prayer can be a pretty intimidating experience. What if I say the wrong thing? What if I mess it up? What if people find out I don't actually pray that much?

All of these are legitimate fears, but let's remove those from the start. Any fear we have of praying in public is likely a result of fearing other people's judgement, not God's. The first thing to know as you're beginning your journey into prayer is that if someone asks you to pray out loud and you really don't feel comfortable doing it, you can always say, "You know what, I don't think I'm quite ready to do that yet." Everyone will understand and someone else can handle it in that moment.

That being said, our prayers shared publicly are a great way to encourage others, build one another up, and release blessings on those we are with. Here are some simple ways you can begin praying publicly with others.

First, start with what's most comfortable. Begin by saying thank you to God for the things He has done and is doing. One of the best ways to share a prayer publicly is to simply thank God for the people you're with, the things He is doing, and, if applicable, the food you're about to enjoy.













# HOW CAN I PRAY WITH MY CHILDREN?

A lot of us are intimidated to pray. It's normal to feel a bit intimidated to begin anything that's new or foreign. However, learning to pray with our kids, is simple and an important place to practice praying. So here is a simple suggestion, when you put your kids down for bed (particularly young children) there are three things that you can pray with them about that will help them naturally develop a conversation with God.

1

The first is thanksgiving. For a child that is a great place to start because it is so easy for a kid to express thanks. After watching you lead out with thanksgiving they will quickly begin imitating you in their own prayers. They start with mommy and daddy and then you watch them open one eye and look around the room and whatever they see is what they thank God for.

2

The second tool for praying with a child is asking for blessings. This is spiritual and it is also biblically practical. Take your hand and put it on your child's chest or head and ask God to bless them with wisdom, courage, strength, or integrity. As you speak into their

lives what you want God to bless them with, you will begin to see these very characteristics develop in the fertile soil of your child's soul.

3

The third thing is to simply brag about your child before God. If you have ever had the experience of turning a corner at work and eavesdropping on a positive conversation about you, you know how that just fills you with energy! Your child will have the same experience when they hear you bragging to God about them.



# HOW CAN I PRAY WITH MY SPOUSE?

Most couples don't pray with their spouse. It can seem intimidating, awkward, and strange at first. Regardless of how it may seem, prayer is one of the most important acts couples can do together to increase the health and longevity of their relationship.

**With this in mind we have a specific challenge for husbands: you are the spiritual leader of your home, and this is your chance to rise to the challenge and lead in the act of praying with your spouse.**

Often men can pray at meals, during CCV Group, or over the kids long before they pray with their wife. This is a skill that is hard for most husbands, even godly leaders. However, it is one of the most powerful tools for spiritual intimacy between a husband and wife. It is something that blesses couples and will allow you to see one another's heart for God and pursue a Christ-centered home. These simple tips will fast track your prayers with your spouse.

## PREPARATION

- 1** Choose a time that is convenient. Often couples run on different schedules and rhythms. If you want this to become a habit (and trust me you do!), make this time the highest of priorities.
- 2** Choose a place that is not distracting. If you're trying to pray at the dinner table when the kids are throwing food, the dog is jumping in your lap, the TV is on, and your cell phones are buzzing, it will never work. Find a place that is quiet and isolated.
- 3** Pray in the rhythm of the ritual of your day. For you that may be as you get ready for bed or after breakfast before you head to work. Do it in a rhythm so it becomes a ritual. It doesn't have to be every day. You might take weekends off, Mondays, or holidays. Don't feel guilty if you skip a day or fluctuate on days off.

# PRAYER

**1** Start your prayer by thanking God for your spouse. This will go a long way of establishing a healthy marriage. As you express thankfulness to God for your mate they can hear your praise in a powerful way that will fill them with joy and security.

**2** Next, ask God to bless your spouse with energy, wisdom, strength, and peace. Walk God through one another's day—appointments, challenges, and frustrations. You won't believe how this attentiveness with God will make an incredible impact.

**3** Third, brag to God about your spouse. Be specific about the qualities, characteristics, and nature that you see in one another and how they have blessed you. Affirm both how you see them now and how you see them growing in Christ.

**4** The last thing, and this is something you wouldn't do with your kids, but do this with your spouse: Tell God your dreams, your hopes, and your fears. When your spouse can eavesdrop on an honest conversation you're having with God, they will learn more about who you are as a Christ follower than any dinner table conversation.

There is so much upside to prayer. This is one of the biggest wins that you will have with God and with your family in helping them develop a deeper and stronger relationship with Christ on their journey to the heart of God.

## DISCUSS THIS

- 1 Of the four parts that make up the P.R.A.Y. method of prayer, which do you see as the easiest and which is the most challenging?
- 2 Has anyone taught you to pray or modeled prayer for you? How can you apply their example to your own practice of prayer?
- 3 What is a time and place you could set aside as a new rhythm for prayer and conversation with God?
- 4 How do you communicate with other people best? Could you use your natural communication skills and apply them to prayer?

## DO THIS

**Develop a routine of personal prayer time, place, and practice.**

- If you have kids, develop a routine of prayer at your kids' bedtime.
- If you are married, develop a routine of prayer with your wife—time, place, and practice.

## MEMORIZE THIS

### **Matthew 6:9b-13**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Notes:**

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# WHY IS THE BIBLE SO HARD TO READ?

## SESSION THREE

There are all kinds of reasons the Bible cannot be approached or read in the same way as any other book in history. The Bible was written in another language, in another place, and another time. It covers the deepest questions of life, philosophy, and religion. Finally, it spans 1500 years, 3 continents, 66 books, and 40 authors.

One the first and most critical aspects to realize as we read the Bible is it is a Middle Eastern text. This means that the stories, situations, characters, and narratives within scripture are written through the lens of ancient Middle Eastern culture. For obvious reasons, this will impact the way we hear and read much of what the Bible says. Is the Bible still relevant to us today even though it was written so long ago and in such a vastly different culture? Yes, however to ignore the context and cultural implications of its origin would be shortsighted at best.

Another aspect that can create an added degree of difficulty is that scripture was first written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. Much like English, each of these languages have nuances and uniquenesses that create a complexity and richness to what we read when we open the Bible during

our own quiet times. While we have successfully translated scripture into a wide range of world languages, understanding its languages of origin is important to its meaning and content and cannot be overlooked.

If you've ever read or attempted to read scripture all the way through you probably noticed that it's not composed chronologically, or in the order events took place. Instead, the Bible is composed in sections. The first five books (called the Torah) were written by Moses and give us history and law. There's also specific historical sections relating to the nation of Israel (God's chosen people). The law and history is followed by wisdom, poetry, and prophet sections. Then, the minor prophets, and later we move into the New Testament where the biographies of Jesus are found in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Right after the Gospels we have the story of the first Christian church in Acts, then the letters of the Apostles, and lastly the book of Revelation giving account of what will happen upon Christ's return. It helps to look at scripture not as a chronology, but as a story of truth, pointing to God's love for the world demonstrated through the life, death, and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ, and how we can respond to our heavenly Father's love.

What makes scripture so incredible is its ability to offer deep and rich truths, as well as, simple wisdom and insight for even the youngest and newest of believers.

Don't be intimidated by the things that give it its complexity, but feel invited into a wealth of opportunity no matter where you are in your journey. Because no matter where you are, God has an important message for you.

## HOW CAN I GET THE MOST OUT THE BIBLE?

### 2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There is probably no skill more important to spiritual development than understanding and applying God's word in your own life. If you're a parent, you probably don't want to still be spoon-feeding your child after puberty, the same way you would an infant. Likewise, every Christian needs to grow in this skill of consuming God's word for themselves. This lesson will help fast-track your progress in personal Bible reading and empowering you to take responsibility for your own spiritual growth. We will look at two skills: navigating the whole Bible and digging into a specific passage.

An important thing to keep in mind is to approach scripture with a heart that wants the truths of God's word to be the transformative tool that changes us. What we want to avoid is approaching scripture with the mentality that says, "I am looking to dissect scripture so that it does what I want it to do."

**The Bible is God's word, given to us, so that we might learn to live like Christ and carry out the work of God's kingdom here on earth.**

When asking the question, "How can I get the most out of the Bible?", we begin by aligning our hearts to the desire God has for us to be transformed by His word into the image of Christ.

# IS THE BIBLE HISTORY, A NOVEL, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

The 27 books of the Old Testament (written between 45 AD and 95 AD) are arranged under three major categories in the Bible: GOSPELS, HISTORY, and LETTERS.

The GOSPELS are the primary accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. Matthew and John were among Jesus' 12 Apostles and important eyewitnesses. Mark was a young man who lived in Jerusalem, witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection, and later followed both Paul and Peter on their preaching tours. If you have never read any of the Bible, the book of John is a great place to start.

Luke never personally met Jesus since he was later converted by Paul. He was the only non-Jewish author writing both Luke and Acts—27 percent of the New Testament. The book of Acts is the only HISTORY book of the New Testament. It is a "must read" since it records the eyewitness accounts of the founding and expansion of the Christian church spanning 30 AD to 62 AD

The LETTERS (also called Epistles) were written to local churches to provide guidance, encouragement, and warnings about specific challenges they were facing. Romans is the longest and most important of these letters. However, Ephesians and Philippians have their own majesty and power.



The Bible is a collection of 66 books organized into two parts known as the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “testament” is an agreement or contract.

**The Old Testament** tells of God’s first covenant with the nation of Israel. It is the story of God choosing Israel and rescuing them from slavery in Egypt to make them His own people.

**The New Testament** describes God’s second covenant with all mankind. It is the story of God choosing us and rescuing us from slavery to sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Chart A

Law	History	Poetry	Prophecy Major	Prophecy Minor	
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Hosea	Habakkuk
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Joel	Zephaniah
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Amos	Haggai
Numbers	1 & 2 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Obadiah	Zechariah
Deuteronomy	1 & 2 Kings	Song of Solomon	Daniel	Jonah	Malachi
	1 & 2 Chronicles			Micah	
	Ezra				

The 39 books of the Old Testament were written between 1440 BC and 430 BC but they are not arranged chronologically. Rather, they are organized under four major categories as you can see in Chart A: LAW, HISTORY, POETRY, and PROPHECY.

The books of the LAW were written by Moses. They trace God’s covenant from creation through the founding of the nation of Israel. The books of Genesis and Exodus are the essential background for the story of Jesus.

The books of HISTORY tell the story of the rise, fall, judgment, and redemption of Israel under her kings. The names and places are foreign; the struggles and victories are familiar. 1 and 2 Samuel will help you understand the life of David; and how, as a descendant of David, Jesus fulfilled His legacy as our king.

The books of POETRY contain wisdom and worship of the Jewish people in ancient times. Interestingly, they express the same yearnings we have for God today. Many people read or even sing the Psalms for worship and inspiration. The Proverbs are especially valuable for life wisdom and raising children.

The books of PROPHECY were written by men chosen by God to proclaim His word to the nation of Israel. The Major prophets are not more important than the Minor prophets, they are just longer. All of them are concerned with the spiritual health of Israel, calling God’s people to abandon their sin and live wholeheartedly by His principles.

Many find the prophets the most difficult to understand because the language and history is foreign. If you are ready to tackle one, the book of Isaiah is the most quoted in the New Testament and, therefore, the most influential in the church.

**Chart B**

Gospels	History	Letters (from Paul to Churches)	Letters (from Paul to Pastors)	Circular Letters
Matthew	Acts	Romans	1 & 2 Timothy	Hebrews
Mark		1 & 2 Corinthians	Titus	James
Luke		Galatians	Philemon	1 & 2 Peter
John		Ephesians		1, 2, & 3 John
		Philippians		Jude
		Colossians		Revelation
		1 & 2 Thessalonians		

# HOW DO I DIG INTO A SPECIFIC PASSAGE?

We want God's word to transform our lives so that we can honor God, love others, and impact our culture. The following steps will help you move from information to transformation?

**Pick a bible you are comfortable with.** There isn't one right Bible, so don't worry about picking the most accurate translation or the perfect packaging (with the right notes, maps, or pictures). Just find one you can read and are comfortable carrying with you. We have found that many people get great mileage out of the NIV Study Bible. It's a bit more expensive, but it has a tremendous amount of helpful study tools. Take some time just to explore your study bible and see what's in there. Here are five things we find most helpful:

- 1 The Table of Contents lists every Bible book and the page it is on to help you quickly locate passages.
- 2 Timelines list dozens of events from the Bible and world history to help you see when things took place. Similarly, maps help you know where things took place.
- 3 Introductions to each Bible book give you vital information about the author, purpose, time, and outline of the book.

The goal of reading the Bible is not **INFORMATION** but **TRANSFORMATION**.

Throughout each book there are also footnotes that give brief explanations about historical backgrounds and words important to the meaning of the passage.

- 4** In the margins on each page are a bunch of other Bible passages that augment your understanding of that particular verse. Here's how to read those references. The chapter is the number before the colon and the verse after it. So John 3:16 means the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of John.
- 5** In the back is a powerful tool called a concordance. It will list the most important words in the Bible, give you short definitions, and list a few important passages where that word is found. This is an invaluable tool if you are looking to define a word or chase down a topic of interest to you.

While there is no replacement for an actual Bible you can hold in your hands, many people also use the free YouVersion app for reading on the run. It includes many versions and languages, including several audio versions you can listen to on your commute! The end-game is to get a Bible that you enjoy reading and look forward to spending time with each day.

**READ THE BIBLE.** Once you choose a Bible, the next step is **READING** it. You need three essential things in order to get the most out of reading the Bible:

- 1 A PLACE.** Choose a quiet place and consistent time to read your Bible. Turn your phone off and dig in. 10 to 15 minutes is probably a good target at first.
- 2 A PLAN.** Some people like to read straight through from Genesis to Revelation; others want to read chronologically by jumping from book to book. Perhaps the best place for beginners is to read the following four books: Genesis, John, Acts, and Romans. These will lay a strong foundation for reading the whole Bible.
- 3 A PEN.** As you read, if there is something you don't understand simply jot down a question in the margin of your bible. Curiosity is a great ally of spiritual growth. Remember, the goal is not information but transformation. So your questions should not be mere curiosity, but how to apply these principles at home, work, and in your neighborhood. Many find that journaling a prayer about the text is a great way to grow in awareness of how to apply the passage. A simple strategy is to write two things each day: (a) What stood out to me in this passage? (b) How will I live that out practically today? Also, memorizing a verse so you can say it aloud, is a powerful crowbar for the Holy Spirit to use.

# HOW CAN I MAKE THIS HABIT STICK?

Let's face it, there will be times when you won't be consistent in reading the Bible. Perhaps it's because of business, discouragement, or good old-fashioned laziness. It happens to all of us. It might help to set realistic goals for yourself and share these goals with someone who wants to read along with you. Don't be discouraged. God certainly understands. Pick up right where you left off.

**God has promised blessing and success to those who diligently seek Him in His word.**

## Joshua 1:8

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

# DISCUSS THIS

- 1 Talk about your previous experiences with Bible reading. What was helpful? What was not helpful?
- 2 What time and place will you establish to help you get the most out of reading God's Word?
- 3 What will you do to help God's Word move from your head to your heart (such as memorization, journaling, etc.)?
- 4 Who will keep you accountable in your Bible reading so you can stay on track and not get discouraged?

## DO THIS

Purchase (or pull out) a Bible you will read. Identify a place and time to read each week (shoot for 3, 5, or 7 days, that is up to you). Choose a reading plan that dives into one book or takes you through the entire Bible. Find a blank journal to write three things:

1

Questions about the reading.

2

One thing that stood out to you with each reading.

3

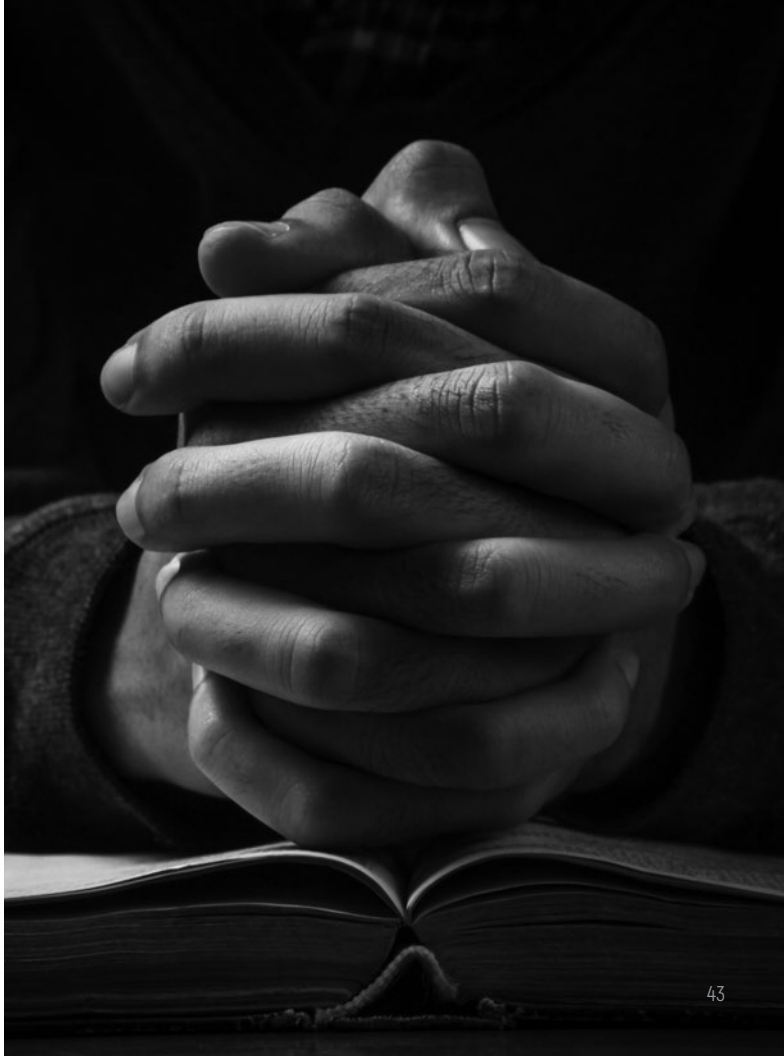
One thing you will do today to apply that principle to your life.

## MEMORIZE THIS

### **James 1:22**

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says.



## NEXT STEPS

**The church is a group of believers God changed, called, and equipped to accomplish His mission.**

## WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO AT CHURCH?

If you're new to the church world there's a lot of things you likely have questions about. What do people wear to church? Why do people always smile at me from across the lobby? Is it normal for people to ask me "who I'm doing life with" or "how's my walk going"?

Church has a pretty unique culture. We are not just people with crazy lingo who assemble for an hour a week. In fact, church isn't a place at all. See, when the Bible talks about the Church it's actually not talking about a place, but a group of people.

The Church has always been and will always be a collection of people devoted to God's kingdom works.

In everything we do at CCV during the services it's our aim to bring glory to God, community to His people, and the truth of the Gospel to lives in need. As the Church, it is our mission to win the lost to Christ, train the believer for ministry, and send one another out into the world to share the Good news of Jesus Christ.

In this section we are going to tackle not only the unique things that make the Church what it is, but also why we create the specific environment we do here.

## IS THE MUSIC A CONCERT?

### **Psalms 7:17**

I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness; I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High.

If you're relatively new to attending church it can seem a bit odd that every time we get together we sing. The closest thing many people relate the worship aspect of church to is a concert. This makes sense from a practical level, but the truth is, it's much more than just a concert.

The weekend service is meant to be a celebration with a community of believers in your area to recognize all that God has done and is doing around us. It's a time to publicly point out that God is worthy of our worship and attention and that we are placing ourselves under Him.

James MacDonald puts it this way in his book Vertical Church,

**“When you worship, you are saying, ‘This one is worth more.’ At the same time you are implying, ‘I am worth less’.”**

John the Baptist describes the heart of worship in this short statement in John 3,

### **John 3:30**

He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.


Why do we use music as a primary way to worship? Because music is one of the most powerful kinds of language. Remember the song you used to listen to growing up with your friends? Remember the song you had your first dance to? What about the song you and your spouse danced to at your wedding? Think about all the feelings and emotions those songs carry with them as you hear them in your head. As we sing words intentionally written to draw our hearts towards God the language of music connects us deeply with Him.

Worship is not the prelude or intro to the sermon. In fact, it's actually the other way around. James MacDonald talks further about worship in Vertical Church with this thought,

“We don't worship so that preaching will be more impactful for us; we preach so that worship will be more impactful for God.”

Worship is what our lives are about, and the opportunity to do it in community with other believers is our way of bringing the deserved glory to God each week.





**All praise will rise  
To Christ our King**



COFFEE SHOP  
CLOSED.

HOURS OF OPERATION:  
Days 4:30 pm-7:30 pm  
Days 8:30 am-12:30 pm



100% OF TIPS  
will help send our  
students to camp!

DID YOU  
KNOW?

FEELING HUNGRY?

OATMEAL \$2.00

\$1 trail mix &

MUFFINS \$2

CHIPS 50¢

grand total \$1.50

ALSO TRY THE  
GRILL OUTSIDE

# WHY A COFFEE SHOP AND GRILL?

Ok, we admit it, this one is pretty unique to us here at CCV. But, having a coffee shop, BBQ pits, and many of the other great things here at CCV is more than just a borderline caffeine and ground beef addiction.

The truth is the idea of eating, drinking, and having a space to hang out together as community and family goes all the way back to the very first church written about in the book of Acts in the Bible.

## **Acts 2:46**

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

See, the very first church broke bread together each time they met as a way of building community and connecting with one another. Here at CCV we want to “break bread” in community each week as well, we just believe bread tastes way better with ground beef in between it. We’re pretty sure the apostles would agree.

When it comes to community, most people program fellowship; we architect it. If there was a formula to successful community building we think it would look something like this:

Casual Space + Good Food + Great People =  
**Awesome Stuff Waiting to Happen**

Jesus also knew the value of food, drinks, and building community based environments. In fact, all throughout Jesus’ time here on earth many of the religious leaders accused Jesus of being out of line for how much He ate and drank with people of “low position” or the “sinners” and “tax collectors”. Jesus valued time spent around the table, good food and drinks, and talking about what God was doing. We figure if Jesus saw value in it, we should too.

As strange as it may seem to many people, there is something special about a church where people sit, talk, laugh, and play for hours after the service has ended. So, the next time you see the BBQ’s going or smell the coffee brewing, know that community is being architected and it’s a good thing.

# WHAT'S UP WITH THE CRACKER AND JUICE?

Each week at CCV we take something called communion. Communion is an important part of how we as believers remember and celebrate all that Jesus did on the cross. If you come from a Catholic or similar religious background you may be familiar with communion at least in practice, but what about the purpose and meaning behind it?

Communion began on the night Jesus was betrayed by Judas, His close friend and disciple, and is still carried on in tradition today. The Bible records that important night and the first communion in the Gospels.

## **Luke 22:19**

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus instructs us to take communion together and remember Him and His sacrifice regularly as we come together through the bread and juice.

Now, the bread (or crackers as it may be) and juice don't have any magic or miraculous powers (even the gluten free ones).

The bread and juice are symbolic elements that allow for a universal connection to the sacrifice Jesus made to bring us into relationship with God for all eternity.

So, we continue this today.

# DO YOU PAY EVERYONE WHO WORKS HERE ON THE WEEKEND?

Do you remember your first time here on a CCV campus? Odds are from the time you drove into the parking lot until you walked back to your parked car there were more people smiling and waving at you than you would find at a flight attendant convention.

At CCV, one of the core values we hold highly is our value of serving. We challenge our members and those who call CCV their home church community to be a part of our mission by serving in a specific role at one of our campuses.

As a church, one of the things we are most proud of is how our members have answered that challenge. There are so many people living out their faith through serving on campus that it allows CCV to have one of the lowest paid staff per capita for a church of its size.

The simple truth is we don't pay the majority of people helping on campus each weekend. We have such wonderful people volunteering to do incredible work to carry out the vision and mission God gave us.

Some might read this and think, "Great, so you're good, right? You won't mind if I just keep coming and let those who are good at it keep serving?". Absolutely not! We challenge people to serve not just because we have programmatic needs, but because the Bible places such a high value on it as a way to grow in our faith.

### **1 Peter 4:10**

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

**Serving moves you from the stands as a spectator and onto the field as a player.**

We've seen incredible life change and transformation in the lives of those who have taken the challenge to serve on the weekend. When we serve we take ownership of the mission, vision, and values using our gifts to move them forward.

While the paid staff of CCV are here on campus fulfilling their roles as either part time or full time ministry leaders the heart and soul of the ministry work happening here comes from people just like you answering the call to serve here at CCV.

### **Ephesians 5:1-2**

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

## **DISCUSS THIS**

- What were some things that caught you off guard the first time you stepped into church?
- How has your experience at CCV been unique to other church experiences?
- How has being in church helped shape your faith?
- Would you consider taking the next step of connecting to a group?

## DO THIS

Write down the names of 1-3 people you would like to pray about inviting to join you at church?

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- Write out the following prayer in your Bible or on a card and keep it somewhere that will allow you to pray it regularly:

“God, I pray for an opportunity to invite \_\_\_\_\_ into our church. I ask you to give me the words to say, the courage to speak to them, and the peace to know you are in control even if they say no. I won’t give up on inviting them just as you never gave up on me, Amen.”

- Tape this card in a place you will see it regularly.
- If you aren’t already in one, open the CCV group finder, locate a group, and join in!

## MEMORIZE THIS

### Ephesians 1:22-23

**And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**







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