

Dear Friend,

You have made one of the best decisions in your life! I'm sure you'll see what a difference it makes. Committing your life to Jesus Christ won't make your problems go away. But making that decision will help you to overcome life's difficulties because you have been brought into a unique relationship with God the Father. And it is in and through that relationship, that God wants to show you how much He loves and cares for you.

I'm sure you have lots of questions, I know I did and still do. Making a commitment to Christ is similar to the commitment a couple makes to one another when they are married. Many times neither the bride nor groom understand the full implications of those two little words, "I do". But as they grow together and spend more and more time with each other, they also grow in their understanding of their commitment. In the same way, you may not fully understand your commitment to Christ. Like that young couple, you will come to understand more and more as you spend time with God and mature as a believer.

This booklet is designed to help you get started in your new life in Christ. It will answer many of the questions that new Christians ask. I want to help any way that I can. If you would like more information or would like to talk to someone about your decision, I'd love to hear from you.

Warmly,
Pastor Stuart Szmaciasz

Discovering My New Life in Christ
is divided into five parts:

- **My Decision** - You'll see what God has done to establish an intimate relationship with you.
- **My Doubts** - You will discover practical help for the most common questions asked by new believers.
- **My Desires** - You will learn about the ways God will be working in your life.
- **My Direction** - You will find out what it means to follow the Lord and identify with Him.
- **My Development** - You will be introduced to the habits that will enable you to grow as a believer.

How to Use this Booklet

As you read through this booklet, you'll want to think about your own decision. Reaffirm in your heart the decision you made to trust Christ, thank Him for what He has done. Rejoice in the promises He has made.

If you don't understand something, put a question mark by it, write your observations in the margins. Take time to answer the questions in each section entitled "**On My Own**". You'll enjoy discovering God's truth on your own. You'll see that He has good news for you.

You may find that it is helpful to re-read certain sections in the coming weeks. One of our first battles as new believers is our battle with doubt. Write out the verses that you find helpful and try to commit them to memory. Use this book as a resource as you begin your new life in Christ.

Section 1 - My Decision

An important first step in your new life in Christ is understanding your decision. In this section, you'll discover what God did for all people so that they could come into a personal relationship with Him. You will also see what God's plan says about how a person enters that relationship. You can use this portion of the booklet as an evaluation and confirmation of your own decision. We encourage you to work through the booklet answering the questions from your own understanding and experience.

When people make the decision to commit their life to Jesus Christ, they do so for different reasons;

- Some people are having personal struggles and have found life too difficult to handle alone.
- Others make that decision because they feel like they've made a mess of their life and need help in straightening things out.
- Still other respond to God's message because it offers a better way of living with assurances of peace and lasting contentment.

Yet all of these reasons and many more we could cite all have in common one thing;

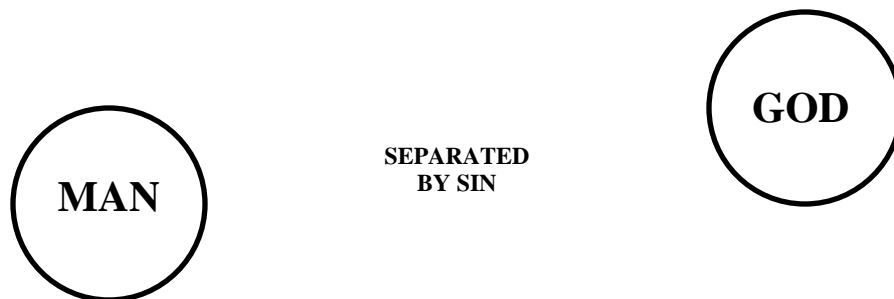
Man is separated from God

That's why when people hear the good news of the gospel, they want to be reunited with God and enjoy the kind of life He wants to give. In the following pages, you'll see what God has done to reunite man with Himself.

Man and God are separated by sin.

"But your iniquities [sin, wrong doing] have separated you from your God . . ." ~ Is. 59.2

"All have sinned and fall short of God's glorious ideal." ~ Ro. 3.23



What is sin?

Sin is man's natural desire to be "boss" and ignore God's principles for living. Sin has affected the whole human race;

"All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, and each of us has turned to his own way." ~ Is. 53.6

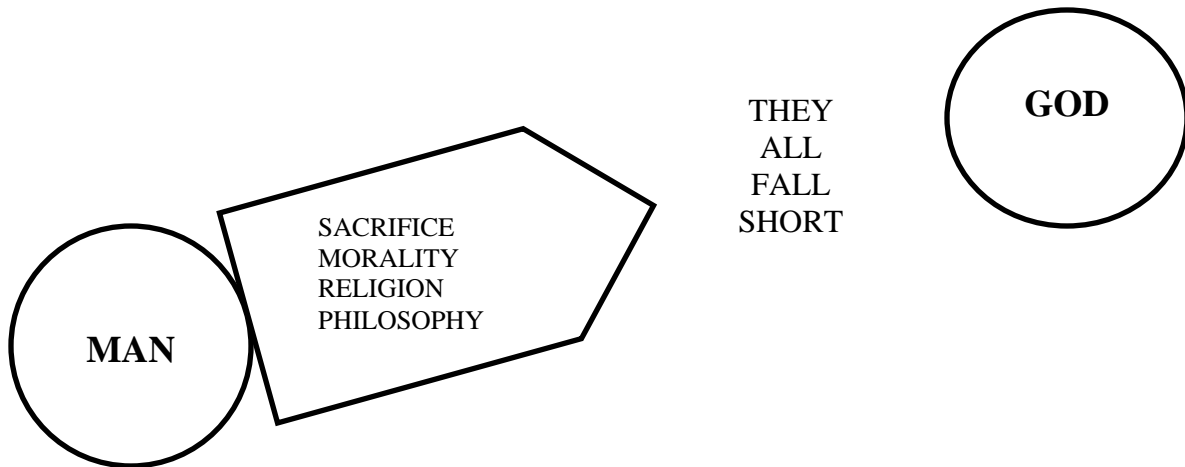
*"If we say that we never sin, we are only fooling ourselves, and refuse to accept the truth."
~ I Jn. 1:8*

Why does sin separate me from God?

Though God made me to enjoy a personal relationship with Him, man chose to break that relationship to be his own "boss". It is that rebellion that characterizes all men. God is holy, which not only means he is absolutely pure, but also that he cannot tolerate sin. So God had to devise a plan that would satisfy both His love [which wanted to be united with man] and His holiness [which demanded they be separated]. But man keeps on trying to devise his own ways of reaching God, because man wants to remain "boss".

Man makes many attempts to restore that relationship, but they all end in failure.

"There are ways that seem right to man, but they only end in death." ~ Pr. 16.25



Some will try various ways of reaching God (Illustration B);

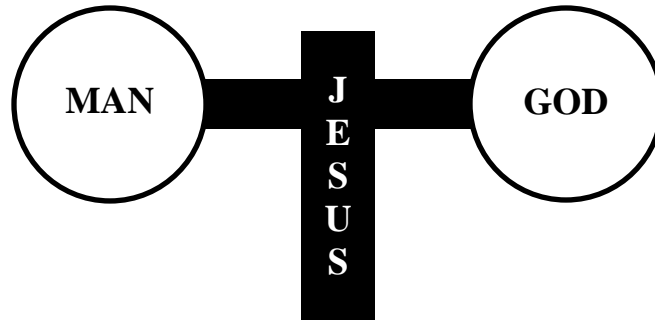
- Sacrifice - There are those that think that the way to God is through human efforts. Yet, God says;
"He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy." ~ Ti. 3.5
- Morality - Others think that what they need to do is be a "good person". They get this idea that if they give up their vices, treat others fairly and try to do the right thing that they will please God.
But our good works aren't good enough; ". . .all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. . ." ~ Is. 64.6
- Religion - There are also those who think that what they need is church. They attend regularly, give faithfully and go through all of the motions, but as Jesus himself said;
"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord'. . .will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only He who does the will of my Father in heaven." ~ Mt.7.21
- Philosophy - And others think, "The problem is in the mind, if I get my thinking right, everything else will come into focus. Yet the Bible says;
"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." ~ Col. 2.8

What's the solution?

God Himself came to earth as a human being to bring us back to Himself. If any other way could have worked, Jesus Christ would not have had to come. **The Way is a Person!**

"God is on one side and all the people are on the other side, and Christ Jesus is between them to bring them together, by giving His life for all mankind." ~ Ti. 2.5

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me!" ~ Jn. 14.6



Jesus has taken care of your sin problem and has provided the way to restore your relationship to the Father. God reached down to man who couldn't reach Him, He took the initiative. God did this for us because He loves us and wants us to know Him.

"God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still separated from God by sin, Christ died for us." ~ Ro. 5.8

Jesus paid the penalty set for our sins, death. In dying, he satisfied God's holiness. It then cleared the way for God to demonstrate His great love for mankind. God has already done His part to restore our relationship to Him. Now He waits for each of us to individually accept what He has done for us.

What does God want me to do?

1. Admit that God has not been first place in your life and ask Him to forgive your sins.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from every wrong." ~ I Jn. 1.9

2. Believe that Jesus died to pay for your sins and that He rose again on Easter, and is alive today.

"If you confess that Jesus is your Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." ~ Ro. 10.9

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name (Jesus) by which we must be saved." ~ Acts 4.12

3. Accept God's free gift of salvation, Don't try to earn it.

"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."

Our relationship to God is not restored by anything *we* do, but on the basis of what Jesus already did for us!

4. Invite Jesus Christ to come into your life and be the Director ("Lord") of your life.

"To all who receive Him, He gives the right to become the children of God. All we need to do is to trust Him to save us. All those who believe this are reborn! - not a physical rebirth. .but from the will of God!" Jn. 1.12-13

"Jesus says, 'Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in..." ~ Re. 3.30

You can take these steps by praying a simple prayer of commitment to God:

"Dear Jesus, thank you for making me and loving me, even when I've ignored you and gone my own way. I realize I need you in my life and I'm sorry for my sins. I ask you to forgive me. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand it more. As much as I know how, I want to follow you from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept your gift of salvation. Please help me to grow now as a Christian."

If you committed your life to God today or sometime recently, you may want to sign and date this commitment. That way you will always remember the day of your new beginning.

Signed _____ Date ____/____/____

"Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." ~ Ro. 10.13

God's promise to you is if you will respond to Him and call on Him, He will do His part. Based on God's Word, if you have called on His name [like in the prayer] you are saved.

ON MY OWN

Before moving on to the next section, take a few moments to answer the following questions;

1. Read through John 3.16 (below). Now read it a second time substituting your name for the underlined words.
"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that, whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." ~ John 3.16

a. What did God's love motivate Him to do? _____

b. In the verse above, what does God promise to the one who believes in His Son? _____

2. Read John 1.12-13 and answer the following;
"Yet to all who receive Him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. . . children . . . born of God." ~ Jn. 1.12-13

a. How are you born into God's family? _____

b. In your own words, tell why you think God refers to salvation as being born into a family. _____

3. State briefly how you know that God is now your Father and you are a part of His family. _____

4. Read John 5:24.
"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. . . " ~ Jn. 5.24

a. To whom does this promise apply? _____

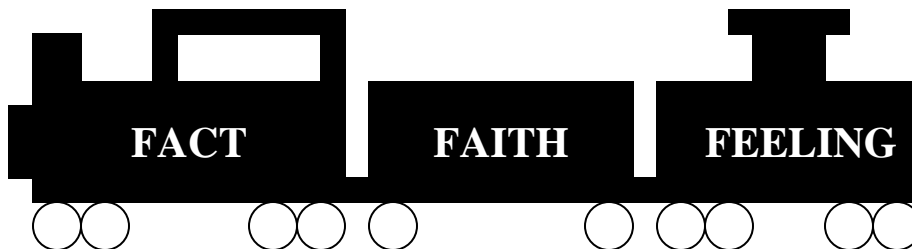
b. What are the two results that come from hearing and believing the message of Christ? _____

Section 2 - My Doubts

Without a doubt, one of the most frequently asked questions by new believers is,

Question 1 - "What if I don't feel any different?"

It is a very legitimate question. Let's try to find the answer. Remember ". . . do not depend upon feeling. The promise of God's Word, not our feelings, is our authority. The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word. The train diagram below illustrates the relationship between FACT (God and His Word), FAITH (our trust in God and His Word), and FEELING (the result of faith and obedience) (John 14.21).



The train will run with or without the caboose. However, it would be futile to attempt to pull the train by the caboose. In the same way, we, as Christians, do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and the promise of His Word." (Ten Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity, *Here's Life Publishers*, p. 185)

God's promise to you is ". . . call on the Lord and you will be saved" (Rom. 10.13). If you have called on Him, you are saved on the basis of His Word, not on whether or not you feel saved. Feelings, like the caboose, follow faith. The feelings will come in time, but the most important test is whether you have responded in faith to God's promise.

Question 2 - "Can I really know if I'm saved?"

Many people are plagued with doubts about their salvation, especially whether or not they can truly know they are saved. One of the writers of the New Testament, John, wrote to a group of believers who were struggling with the same question. Look at what John told them;

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." ~ I John 5.13

John explained that the reason he wrote them was to give them assurance that they could know that they were saved. So what did John write to them about? He wrote to them about changed attitudes or desires. Remember how we defined sin as man's desire to be "boss". John explains that there are two attitudes that characterize a believer;

- 1.) He desires to obey God (His attitude is no longer selfish, to be his own "boss"). I Jn. 2.3-5; 3.3, 10, 24; 5.18
- 2.) He loves people (His attitude changes toward others) I Jn. 2.9-10; 3.10, 18-19; 4.7, 16

It's not that he is perfect (I Jn. 1.8), but his desires have changed. In the same way, you will not always please God, you will still fail. But your desire to please Him remains, you'll want to please Him. The next section will talk more about desires and attitudes that the Lord will change. One way you can know you are saved is through the change you notice in your attitudes. This is a subjective proof, a more objective proof is what we learned in looking at feelings. Your salvation is as sure as God's promises (Titus 1.2), if you have believed in Jesus Christ you do not have to doubt. You have a relationship with God and are going to heaven.

Question 3 - "Can God forgive all my sin?"

Many people struggle with their past. They feel like their sins and failings are so deep, that they go beyond God's forgiveness. They have persuaded themselves that they've gone too far and God could not possibly forgive their wrongs.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth some very encouraging words. In this verse you get a glimpse of the former lifestyle of some of the "saints" of Corinth;

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." ~ I Cor. 6.9-10

You may be thinking, "Whoa! I thought you were going to help me." Don't give up yet, notice the next verse;

"And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus . . ." ~ I Co. 6.11

Not only is Paul very clear that there were people in the Corinthian church that had come out of very immoral pasts, but the best part is that he says, "that's what you were. . ." (past tense). In other words, your past is in the past. You see, it doesn't matter what you've done, God can make you clean. Take assurance from another letter of Paul's;

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." ~ 2 Co. 5.17

There is absolutely no one who knows you better than God does (Psalm 139.1-6). He knows you better than you know yourself. God knows what we do and why we do it. Yet the one who knows us best, loves us most! God loves you and accepts you. Don't fear His rejection, He stands ready to forgive.

Question 4 - "How can I overcome my fears?"

Many new Christians find themselves coping with fear. Fears can paralyze you and leave you unfulfilled. The most important thing to remember about fear is that it does not come from God.

"For God has not given us the spirit of fear. . ." II Ti. 1.7(AV)

"He has raised up a horn of salvation for us. . . to enable us to serve Him without fear. . ." ~ Lk. 1.69, 74

Of all the prohibitions in the Bible, "Fear not!" appears more than anything else (more than even the 10 commandments). Whatever your apprehension is, ask God to help you defeat it, He is on your side. He doesn't want you to be afraid!

Question 5 - "What if I can't live the Christian life?"

On your own you can't live the Christian life! But God does not save you to abandon you. He doesn't give you a start, only to let you finish. Other believers have had to deal with this same dilemma;

"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal through human effort?" ~ Ga. 3.3

The way you begin your new life is the same way you continue in your new life, by faith. You continue to trust God to work in and through you. If you try to do it on your own, you're bound to fail. Remember, it was wanting to be your own "boss" that got you to where you were. Put your trust in the One who is able.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ~ Ga. 2.20

ON MY OWN

Before moving on to the next section, take a few moments to answer the following questions;

1. What would you say to someone who made a decision to commit their life to Christ and was concerned about not feeling any different? _____

2. Have you noticed any new attitudes in your life since you trusted Christ? If so, what changes have you noticed? _____

3. Read Hebrews 8.12 and answer the following questions;
"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
 - a. How does God view forgiven sin? _____
 - b. What does that mean to you personally? _____
4. Look at God's promise in I John 1.9;
"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
 - a. What does God ask us to do? _____
 - b. How is God described in this verse? _____
 - c. What does God promise to do? _____
 - d. On the basis of God's promise, what does that mean to you when you confess your sin to Him? _____

5. Examine Proverbs 28.13;
"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."
 - a. What is the result of not admitting your sin? _____
 - b. What happens when we admit our sin? _____

Section 3 - My Desires

In this part of the booklet, you will learn about the ways God will be working in your life. Discovering how God is changing you will be an encouragement. Not only will you see how God is changing what was bad, but you will also see how He is replacing it with something much better.

When do the changes begin?

Many of us wonder, "When will I begin to notice these changes?" There is no simple answer to that question. For some people, the day of their commitment, they begin noticing a difference. Yet for others, it seems that weeks go by before they can tell that something has happened. Why is there such a variety of response? I think that it is largely due to the fact that God has made us so different. The person who notices immediate changes has no better experience than the one who does not. The most important thing to remember is that you are not saved on the basis of how you feel, or what you do, or what you experience. The reason we can know we are saved is because we have believed what God has said, nothing more, nothing else and nothing less. Don't be discouraged if there has not been a drastic or sudden change in your desires. Changes will come in time. For now, keep on believing that what God has said is true and that He is at work in your life.

Where do the changes begin?

Jeremiah said that it is the heart of man that is corrupt;

"The heart is deceitful above all things. . ." ~ Je. 17.9

Jesus recognized that the heart was the source of good or evil in man;

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. . ." ~ Mt. 15.19

The heart is the inner person, it includes the emotional, intellectual and spiritual side of man. Therefore, in order to change your behavior, God begins at the source, the inner person. In other words, to change the outside, He must first change the inside.

". . .because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." Ro. 5.5

You see, God has demonstrated his love to us and directed it to the source of our problems, the heart. In the verse above, He also tells us how He will do it, which leads us to our next question?

How will He change me?

The Holy Spirit is God's instrument for change. When you committed your life to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit came into your heart to take up residence.

"You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit. . .and if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." ~ Ro. 8.9

Romans 8.9 explains that the Holy Spirit indwells all those who belong to Christ. Since you have made that decision to commit to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit now dwells in you. His presence in your life will produce changes, notice the attitudes that are the by-product of the Holy Spirit's presence;

". . .the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." ~ Ga. 5.22-23

Not only is the Spirit producing new and positive attitudes in our life, but He is also making us more like Christ himself.

"And we. . .who reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." ~ II Co. 3.18

If you want a glimpse into the final product, look at the life of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, God is building our lives to mirror the image of His Son. Just imagine all the wonderful things He can and will do in your life.

What changes will I notice?

Besides the changes in attitudes and temperament we've already seen, there will be others too. Some of the earliest changes you will notice relate to your new life in Christ.

-A new desire to be with fellow Christians

As we have already noted, one of the "proofs of salvation" that John cited was a change in attitude toward others (I Jn. 2.9-10; 3.10, 18-19; 4.7, 16). You will notice a new love in your heart for fellow believers. Even those whom you don't know personally. There is a real sense of family with others who know Christ.

-A new desire to know Christ

Paul said it best when he told the church at Philippi;

"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." ~ Ph. 3.8

There is created in us a hunger to know Jesus intimately. As the Holy Spirit is making us more like Christ, our desire becomes greater and greater to know Him more.

-A new desire to discover His message for us

You will also notice that whereas before you may have had little concern for things like the Bible, it has now taken on new meaning. It is God's love letter to you. Not only is it the most relevant book ever written, but when you read it, you sense that it has a personal message just for you. Part of the reason for that is because of the Holy Spirit's work. He guides the believer in his quest for truth and intimacy with God;

". . .the Holy Spirit. . .will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." ~ Jn. 14.26

ON MY OWN

Before moving on to the next section, take a few moments to answer the following questions.

1. Jesus told his followers;

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." ~ Jn. 15.11

a. What attitude of Christ does He want to see develop in you? _____

b. In your own words and understanding, describe the difference between happiness and joy - _____

2. What is the one area of your life where you feel is the greatest need for change? _____

3. God has provided a constant source of strength for the believer;
"And I [Jesus] will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him or knows Him." ~ Jn. 14.16-17

- a. Does the Holy Spirit indwell believers? _____
 - b. What do you think is the significance of calling the Spirit;
- The Spirit of Truth - _____

- The Counselor - _____
 - c. Why can't someone "in the world" (humanity apart from God) accept the Holy Spirit? _____
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4. In a business transaction, the guarantee that the contract will be executed is a deposit called "earnest money".
". . .the Holy Spirit, who is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession. . ." ~ Ep.1.13-14

- a. What has God chosen as His guarantee? _____
- b. What does He guarantee? _____

Section 4 - My Direction

As we study "**My Direction**" you will find out what it means to follow the Lord and identify with Him. Being a Christ follower is not always the easiest thing to do. Christ challenged His disciples with words that were often weighty and that cut against the grain of selfish personalities. Listen as He lays His challenge before His followers:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple." ~ Lk. 14.26

Wow! Now that seems like a harsh statement. But let's take a minute to understand the point that Jesus is making. Here is a practical illustration that might help to make sense of Jesus' challenge. When driving on the expressway, have you ever had someone fly past you at "break-neck" speed? You may have remarked, "They past me like I was standing still!" Now you weren't parked on the expressway, you were travelling the speed limit. But the speed of the passing car was so fast that it made your speed seem practically nonexistent. In the same way, Jesus is explaining a necessary condition of being a disciple. In order to be his disciple, our love for Him should be so great that all of our other loves would appear as hate in comparison to our devotion to Christ. To put it in practical terms, are we loving Christ at 55 MPH or 100 MPH? The point is clear, Jesus wants our complete devotion. He wants to be first place in our life. The rest of this section deals with the practical ways of putting Christ first in your life.

Put Christ first in your identification

One of the first priorities for a new believer is to identify with Christ in baptism. Baptism is an outward way of demonstrating your spiritual identification with Christ. Baptism is a visual picture of what Christ did.

"Christ died for our sins. . .He was buried. . .and He rose again." ~ I Co. 15.3-4

In the same way, when we are baptized, we become identified with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

"For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ."
Col. 2.12

Baptism doesn't make you a believer, it shows that you already believe. Baptism does not "save" you, only your faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring, it's the outward symbol of the commitment you made in your heart.

-The Spiritual Commitment

"When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun!" ~ II Co. 5.17

- The Outward Symbol

"By our baptism then we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead. . .so also we may live a new life!" ~ Ro. 6.4

When should you be baptized? As soon as you have believed! There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have decided to receive Christ into your life, you can and should be baptized. As countless Scriptures indicate, when you choose to commit your life to Jesus Christ, you should follow Him in identification by being baptized;

". . .many of the people who heard Him believed and were baptized." ~ Ac. 18.8

"Those who believed. . .were baptized. . .that day!" ~ Ac. 2.41

"Then Philip began with the Scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So they went down into the water and Philip baptized him." ~ Ac. 8.35-38

Baptism is also one of the first commands we face as new believers. Our desire is to please Him through our obedience to His commands. The New Testament writer, John, mentions that one of the ways we know that we are God's children is through our desire to obey Christ;

"We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey His commands." ~ I Jn. 2.3

"Jesus said, 'Go then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and then teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.'" ~ Mt. 28.19-20

There are some practical questions about baptism that we can help answer for you in **C.L.A.S.S. 101 "Discovering Church Membership"**. We have frequent baptismal services at Cornerstone, we would be happy to arrange for you to be a part of our next one.

Put Christ first in your interests

Christ wants to be first place in your interests, concerns and careers. In other words, in every aspect of our life, not just church. Do you realize that God can get glory out of everything that you do;

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." ~ I Co. 10.31

Even the things that we think of as routine or boring can be a source of glory to God. What does it mean to put God first in your interests? There is an excellent example in the New Testament that shows us in practical terms, how to put God first in our interests.

Jesus called two different men to be His followers. Both men were tax collectors (that's why you might call this "A Lesson from the IRS"). But the circumstances after they became Christ followers are vastly different. The men were Matthew and Zacchaeus. Jesus called Matthew "out of his profession", he told Matthew to leave behind his business (Mt. 9.9). But Zacchaeus remained in his profession and allowed His new found faith to influence the way he did business (Lk. 19.2-10).

- Which one was glorifying God? They both were!
- Which one was putting God first? They both were!
- Which one was being a Christ follower? They both were!
- Which one was doing "spiritual work"? They both were!

Put Christ first in your interests. Allow these new attitudes and desires to permeate every aspect of your life. Christ wants to be first in every area of your life.

"(Christ) was raised from death in order that He alone might have the first place in all things." ~ Co. 1.18(GN)

Put Christ first in your intentions

Knowing God's will becomes another important priority to the believer. Christ comes first in our plans or intentions. Putting Christ first in the present is important. Making Him first place in our future is equally important. Some people never consider God's will for their life in regards to goals, plans and decision making;

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go the this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money'. . .Instead, you ought to say, 'If it's the Lord's will we will do this or that.'" ~Ja. 4.13-15

In terms of their;

- Plans-*"Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city"*
- Time-*"spend a year there"*
- Career-*"carry on business and make money"*

They don't consider God. God is offering a better alternative. He wants us to make our plans by putting His will for our lives first.

As we have already learned, there is no one who knows you better than God. No one knows your weaknesses and strengths like Him. And because He knows you so well and loves you so much, He has a plan for your life that is better than anything you can conceive. Putting God first in our intentions means desiring God's will for our lives more than anything else. It is a process of learning to trust Him that He knows best and that His way is best. God's will for your life will fit you like a glove. It will truly make the best use of your talents and abilities and be something that you can really enjoy. So, how can I discover God's will for my life?

Paul wrote to a group of believers about this very thing in Romans 12.1-2;

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Notice how God's will is described (underlined phrase). This verse gives a helpful prescription for discovering God's will for your life;

1. Give your life to God completely - *"offer your bodies as living sacrifices"*
2. Break free from the world's mold - *"do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world"*
3. Allow God to change your thinking - *"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"*

How does all of that happen? Giving our lives completely to God is a conscious decision on our part when we commit to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Breaking free from the world's mold is done largely through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as he changes our attitudes and desires. The process of a change in thinking is also the work of God as He speaks to us through His Word, prayer and fellowship with other believers (which we will look at in the final section "**My Development**").

ON MY OWN

Before moving on to the next section, take a few moments to answer the following questions;

1. From the previous study, complete these statement;

- a. Baptism is symbolic of Christ's _____, _____, and _____.
- b. Baptism is symbolic of my with _____ with Christ.
- c. I should be baptized as soon as I have _____.

2. Read Ac. 8.35-38 again and answer the following;

"Then Philip began with the Scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So they went down into the water and Philip baptized him."

- a. What must proceed baptism? _____.
- b. When did this baptism take place? _____.

3. Think about some practical ways that your new life in Christ will manifest itself in your daily life.

4. God saves people "in their professions" and "out of their professions" What are some ways that Christ's new life may influence your profession? _____

5. Before Christ died on the cross he prayed the night before;

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup (his impending death) be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as You will." ~ Mt. 26.39

- a. What did Jesus mean when he prayed, "...not as I will, but as You will."? _____

- b. How does that apply to the way we should desire God's will in our life? _____

Section 5 - My Development

In this final section, you will be introduced to the habits that will enable you to grow as a believer. This is a major step in the process of transformation that God is working in your life. It is God's will for you to grow to maturity in Christ;

"...that you may become mature Christians and may fulfill God's will for you." ~ Co. 4.12b(Ph)

"We are not meant to remain as children. . .but to grow up in every way into Christ. . ." ~ Eph. 4.14-15(Ph)

That leads us to our final question. "How did I mature as a believer?" There are three basic habits that you will need to develop as a disciple, these are:

Time for God's Principles - The Word

"If you continue in my Word, then you are my disciples indeed. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." ~ Jn. 8.31-32

Time in God's Presence - Prayer

"If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. . .in this way you become my disciples." ~ Jn. 14.7-8

Time with God's People - Fellowship

"Love each other just as much as I love you. Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples." ~ Jn. 13.34-35(LB)

We will look at these three habits briefly to help get you started in your new life in Christ.

Time for God's Principles - The Word

The key to becoming like Christ is allowing God to transform your thinking through the power of His Word;
". . .*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" ~ Ro. 12.2

"As we. . .contemplate the Lord's glory, we are being transformed into His likeness." ~ I Co. 3.18

"...Your life is shaped by your thoughts." ~ Pr. 4.23(GN)

In II Timothy 3.16-17, God tells us the purpose for giving us the Bible;

"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone." ~ II Ti. 3.16-17(LB)

To say it another way, the Bible is God's complete book on how to be spiritually fit. It will teach us what we need to know to become strong spiritually.

From a practical point of view, how do you get started reading the Bible. Many new believers start at the beginning of either the Old Testament (Genesis) or the New Testament (Matthew). That may work well for many people, but often people get bogged down right away because in Genesis 5 or Matthew 1 are two lengthy genealogies (long lists of ancestors). I suggest that you begin with either the Gospel of John or another short, encouraging book like Philippians or Ephesians.

As you read, do two things;

1. Ask yourself, "How can I put this into practice?"

"Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!" ~ Ja. 1.22

"Whoever . . .does not simply listen and forget it, but puts it into practice - that person will be blessed in what he does." ~ Ja. 1.25(GN)

2. Ask yourself, "Which principles do I want to remember?"

"Guard my words as your most precious possession. Write them down, and also keep them deep within your heart." ~ Pr. 7.2-3 (LB)

There are tremendous benefits of memorizing scripture; -It helps me to resist temptation.

"I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you." ~ Ps. 119.11

-It helps me make wise decisions.

"Your Word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path." ~ Ps. 119:105

-It strengthens me when I'm under stress.

"...Your promises to me are my hope. They give me strength in all my troubles; how they refresh and revive me!"
~ Ps. 119.49-50(LB)

-It comforts me when I'm sad.

"Your Words are what sustain me...They bring joy to my sorrowing heart and delight me." ~ Je. 15.16(LB)

Time in God's Presence - Prayer

The disciple's asked Jesus once, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus' response to their request has been called the "Model Prayer". In it are all the essential elements of prayer. As you develop the habit of praying, you will find His practical illustration very helpful in getting the most out of your prayer time.

Mt. 6:9-15 *"This, then is HOW you should pray. . ."*

The six parts of prayer;

1. Praise: *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name. . ."*

There are two kinds of praise:

- Adoration - *praising God for Who He is.*
- Thanksgiving - *praising God for what He has done.*

2. Purpose: *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. . ."*

Pray for God's will to be done...in my family...my church...my ministry...my job...my future...my city...the nation...the world.

3. Provision: *"Give us today our daily bread..."*

Ask God to supply all your daily needs.

"God will supply all your needs from His riches in glory because of what Christ Jesus has done for us."
~ Ph. 4.19(LB)

4. Pardon: *"Forgive us our debts..."*

Ask God to inspect your life and cleanse you daily from any wrongs you have committed.

"Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me..." ~ Ps. 139.23-24(GN)

5. People: *"as we also have forgiven our debtors."*

Pray for those with whom you are having problems, ask God to forgive them for their wrongs against you.

"Pray much for others; plead for God's mercy upon them; give thanks for all He is going to do for them."
~ I Ti. 2.1(LB)

6. Protection: *"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."*

Believers face a spiritual battle every day. Satan wants to defeat you through temptation and fear. By praying for protection, you will have the confidence to face every situation during the day.

"The Spirit Who is in you is more powerful than the spirit who is in those who belong to the world."
~ I Jn. 4.4(GN)

Time with God's People - Fellowship

To keep on growing, you will need to spend time with God's people. Satan knows if he can get you isolated from God and fellow believers, he can cause you to stumble. There is strength that comes from fellowship;

"Two are better than one. . . If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him. . . Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break." ~ Eccl. 4.9-10,12(GN)

You will need encouragement as you begin your new life in Christ. You may find little support at home, or work or school. Sometimes all you have are those who are a part of your new family at church, but remember, that's all that matters. You are a part of God's family now. And He wants you to know that you are loved!

"You are a member of God's very own family. . .and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."
~ Ep. 2:19(LB)

"So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others!" ~ Ro. 12:5

"Let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds." ~ He. 10:24(PH)

"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead let us encourage one another..."
~ He. 10:25(GN)

The "One Another's" of Fellowship

(a partial list)

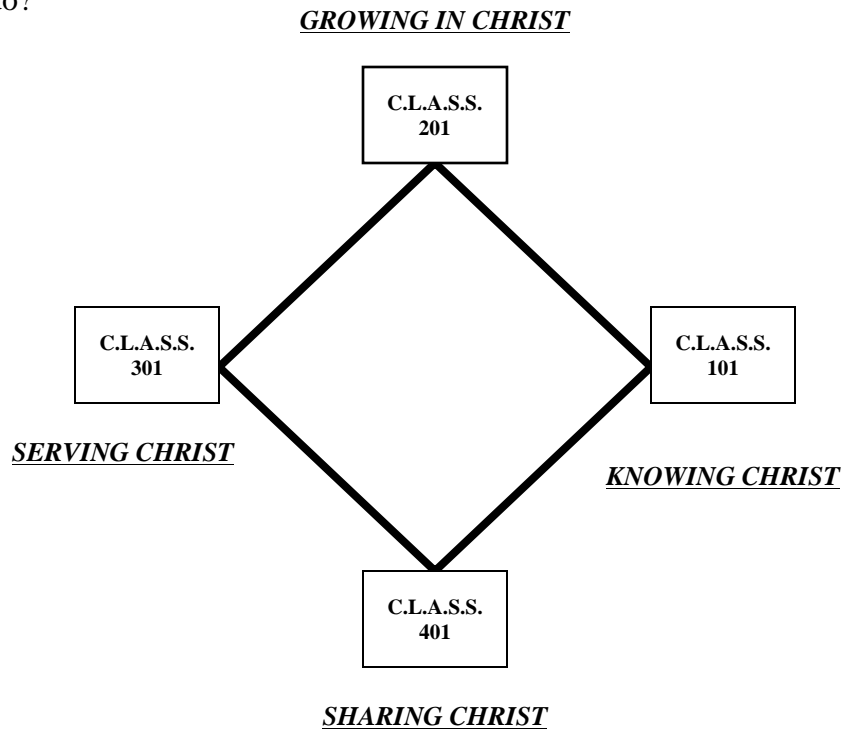
- Serve one another - Ga. 5.13
- Accept one another - Ro. 15.7
- Forgive one another - Co. 3.13
- Greet one another - Ro. 16.16
- Bear one another's burdens - Ga. 6.2
- Be devoted to one another - Ro. 12.10
- Honor one another - Ro. 12.10
- Teach one another - Ro. 15.14
- Submit to one another - Ep. 5.21
- Encourage one another - I Th. 5.11

You need these three simple habits to begin in your new adventure;

- **Time for God's Principles - The Word**
- **Time in God's Presence - Prayer**
- **Time with God's People - Fellowship**

To learn more about starting and maintaining good habits, **C.L.A.S.S. 201 "Discovering Spiritual Maturity"** will teach you practical ways of implementing and maintaining these vital spiritual steps toward Christian Maturity.

Now what do I do?



Go to first base;

C.L.A.S.S. 101 - Discovering Church Membership
We'll acquaint you with Cornerstone Church and why we exist as a church.

Then to second base;

C.L.A.S.S. 201 - Discovering Spiritual Maturity
You'll sharpen the skills necessary to mature as a believer

Then to third base;

C.L.A.S.S. 301 - Discovering My Ministry
You can discover how God wants to use you in His service

Finally, slide into home;

C.L.A.S.S. 401 - Discovering My Mission
You will learn about God's plan to reach the world with the Good News and how you can help.

If you have any questions or would like to speak to Pastor Stuart please call at (610) 681-3534

ON MY OWN

Since you've completed this final section, take a few moments to answer the following questions;

1. Read II Ti. 3.16-17(LB);

"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone."

a. How was the Bible given to us? _____

b. What are the practical benefits of God's Word? _____

2. Can you name some practical benefits of memorizing Scripture? _____

3. In your prayer time what are;

-Some daily needs - _____

-Some praiseworthy things - _____

-People that need prayer - _____

4. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says;

"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead let us encourage one another. . ."
~ He. 10.25

a. What is a main reason for Christians to gather? _____

b. What practical ways can you encourage other believers? _____

5. What is the most valuable lesson you have learned since you have begun your new life in Christ? _____