

WEEK ONE

Taking Your First Steps
as a Follower of Jesus Christ

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Welcome

Since you are reading this, I assume you have decided to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus described what you have just experienced as being “*born again*.” Now, you are a child of God. Let me welcome you to God’s family! You are my brother or sister in Christ. I have the privilege of helping you start to grow from being a baby in Christ toward being a mature follower. That’s a lifelong journey, but now is a good time to start. Will you allow me to be your coach?

I have good news for you. As difficult as this Christian life may seem to you now, you are not alone. Jesus said, “*I am with you always*” (Matt. 28:20). He is with you by His Holy Spirit who has come to live in you. And God places you in the body of Christ—the church—so all the members can help one another become all God wants them to be. We’ll talk more about all that later. For now, just know you are part of a team, and we want to help you grow up to be a mature follower of Jesus.

Jesus said, “*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10, KJV). That’s part of what WEEK ONE is all about—helping you get started toward experiencing that abundant life Jesus has for you. Following Jesus is not easy, but I guarantee this abundant life is worth all your efforts.

Over the course of the next seven days, I’m going to coach you in beginning this new life. I’ll talk with you (in writing) as if I were sitting across the table from you. I’ll ask you some questions or give you an assignment. This is an example:

❖ **How would you describe your background knowledge of what being a Christian means? Check one or write your own.**

- a. I’m from a family with other Christians.
- b. I studied Christianity extensively before making this decision.
- c. I really don’t have much prior knowledge.
- d. _____

Day 1: Understand this New Life

❖ **Read God’s Word for Today:** “God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:** Take a few moments to thank God that He loved you enough to send Jesus to pay the penalty for your sin on the cross. Give Him permission to make you a new creation. You can talk out loud if you have some privacy, or you can pray silently, thoughtfully.

❖ **Remember to circle words you don’t know. Then look them up or ask someone to help you understand them.**

First, let’s review what happens to a person when he or she trusts Jesus Christ and becomes a new creation.

1. Because of sin, a person without Christ is spiritually dead in sin. No works of his own can save him.
2. Jesus lived a sinless life and died as a sacrifice to pay the death penalty for sin.
3. He grants forgiveness and eternal life to those who turn from their sinful ways and receive Him as Savior and Lord.
4. God places the Holy Spirit of Christ in a new believer to help him, guide him, teach him, give understanding, and enable him to do the things God asks of him.
5. God’s goal for your life is that you be transformed into Christlikeness so you think and act like Christ. He has created you for good works that contribute to accomplishing Christ’s mission in the world.

You may not understand all that right now. Don’t worry. God knows where you are and what you need. He cares that you grow to full maturity more than you do. And He has placed His Holy Spirit in you to help with the process. I’m guessing you may need to circle a few words in the previous list. If you haven’t already done so, go ahead and do that now.

Day 2: Spend Time with God Daily

❖ Read God's Word for Today:

“Our Father in heaven,

Your name be honored as holy.

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 do not bring us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

(Matthew 6:9-13).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:** Jesus gave His followers the model prayer you just read. You can pray this prayer, but you also can use it as an example of the way to pray and the kinds of things for which you might ask. Use it as a model as you talk with your heavenly Father today.

- Praise God for his greatness and holiness. Realize that He is the One with whom you are talking.
- Pray that His will be done everywhere and agree that you will obey Him as He makes His will clear to you.
- Ask God to provide the things you need (not just want) today. When He provides, thank Him.
- Confess your sin (debts) and ask God to forgive you. If you need to forgive others, now is the time to seek God's help in doing that.
- Ask God to give you strength to resist temptation to sin and to deliver you from the influence of the devil. Ask God for daily victory over sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.
- Worship Christ as your powerful King (over His kingdom) and stand in awe of His glory (the evidence of God's greatness).

Begin to spend a regular time with your heavenly Father in prayer.

This is not just an item to be checked off your To-Do list. Prayer is a relationship with a Person. God has placed the Holy Spirit of His Son in you to always be with you and guide you. You can talk to Him anytime (aloud or silently). Learn to quietly listen as well. He will speak to you through His Word (more on this tomorrow) and in prayer.

❖ **As you read the following tips, underline the ones that seem to be most important or helpful to you.**

Day 3: Learn about God, His Will & Ways

❖ **Read God’s Word for Today:** “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You. . . . Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:11,105).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:** Thank God for the Bible (God’s Word) through which He has revealed Himself and the good news of salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. Ask Him to help you study and understand His Word so you can know Him better and live as He desires.

Today, I want to talk with you about the importance of the Bible for your spiritual growth. The verses above describe some of the benefits of God’s Word. Knowing God’s Word can help you resist temptations to sin. It can give you insight and direction for daily living. It can provide correction and training for right living. God’s Word is a trustworthy guide for your faith and for daily living.

❖ **Do you have a Bible of your own? ____ If not, buy one or ask your church if they have an extra copy that you may have. You may want to buy a study Bible that has built in Bible study tools.**

❖ **Match each of the following Bible verses with the thing God reveals through that verse in the list on page 9. Write a letter beside each number.**

- A. “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another” (John 13:34)
- B. “Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).
- C. “You, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abundant in faithful love and truth” (Psalm 86:15).
- D. “The Lord disciplines the one He loves. . . . He does it for our benefit, so that we can share His holiness” (Hebrews 12:6,10).
- E. “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me” (John 15:5).

Day 4: Live in Victory

❖ **Read God's Word for Today:** "This is what love for God is: to keep His commands. Now His commands are not a burden, because whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. And who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

(1 John 5:3-5)

"You are from God, little children ... the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:** Tell God how much you love Him. Thank Him for His commands that help you know how to have an abundant life. Pray the prayer of the psalmist: "I delight to do Your will, my God; Your instruction resides within me" (Psalm 40:8). Ask God to help you increasingly experience victory over sin and worldly influences.

Decide to obey God as He reveals His will through His Word and by the leading of His Holy Spirit.

1. Make a conscious decision and pledge to the Lord that you will obey Him as He reveals His will to you.
2. Seek to know His will as you read His Word and pray.
3. When you still don't know what is right or wrong in a matter, ask a trusted and faithful Christian to help you understand.

Begin to put off the old sinful attitudes and actions and put on the new ways of thinking and behaving that honor God.

1. As God reveals attitudes and actions that are wrong, quit doing those things. Say no to the ungodly thoughts and temptations to sin. Avoid places or activities where temptation to sin is strong.
2. As God reveals new ways of thinking and behaving that please and honor Him, add those to your life. Watch for opportunities to think and live in new ways.
3. God desires a relationship with you, being a Christian is not just keeping a list of rules. Jesus wants you to follow Him, love Him, obey Him, and become like Him. And the good news is that He lives in you to guide you and help you obey. Depend on Him for help.
4. When you fail, hurry back to God: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Day 5: Connect with the Body

❖ **Read God’s Word for Today:** “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

“... and all the parts do not have the same function, in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of [or *belong to*] one another” (Romans 12:4-5).

“He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:** Thank God you do not have to live this life of following Christ alone. Ask Him to guide you to the church where He wants you to belong. Ask Him to minister to you through that church family and show you the contributions He wants to make through you.

❖ **Remember to circle words you don’t know. Then look them up or ask someone to help you understand them.**

When you are born again and adopted into God’s family, you become a part of the redeemed [God bought and paid a price for you by the death of Christ on the cross]. You belong to God. But God wants you to be a part of a local church (often called the body of Christ) where members help one another grow up into full maturity. The body of Christ, as God’s representative, then carries out God’s mission to help people get right with (be reconciled to) God. We have the assignment of making disciples of all peoples. Now that you are a disciple (follower) of Jesus Christ, you have the privilege and responsibility of joining that effort of helping others come to know and trust Christ and grow to maturity.

Join a church family where you can experience all the benefits of being a part of the body of Christ. Check each one as you get started.

Day 6: Tell Your Story

❖ **Read God’s Word for Today:** “Everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:**

- Thank God that He has begun a good work in your life.
- Tell the Lord Jesus about your desire to let others know about your personal relationship with Him.
- Ask Him to empty you of self-centeredness and cleanse you of sin so that He can fill you with His Holy Spirit and with power!

One day Jesus met a demon-possessed man whose life was out of control. He had lost his family and his sanity. In love, Jesus healed him and set him free from the demons that held him in bondage. Out of great joy, the man wanted to travel with Jesus, but Jesus had a different assignment for him: “Go back home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy on you.’ So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed” (Mark 5:19-20).

Those who have been born again, forgiven, cleansed, and set free by Jesus Christ have a story to tell. And that story grows day-by-day as God continues to transform your life by the work of His Holy Spirit in you.

❖ **Use a separate sheet of paper or, better yet, start keeping a journal or a diary to record some details about why and how you chose to become a follower of Jesus Christ. You may want to answer questions like: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? Think about this: What is different today because of Jesus? Do you feel peace, love, freedom from sin or bondage, released from guilt, clean, befriended, or ___ ? Take a few minutes now to make some notes before you continue below.**

Suppose Jesus were to say to you what He said to the formerly demon-possessed man: “Go back home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how He

Day 7: Plan and Take Next Steps

❖ **Read God’s Word for Today:** “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2, KJV).

❖ **Talk to God in Prayer:** Thank God for what He has begun doing in your life. Ask Him to help you continue growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ—your Savior. Ask God to feed you with His Word.

❖ **Check each of the following items you would like to experience as you follow Jesus Christ.**

- A. I’d like to share in God’s divine nature.
- B. I’d like to escape the sinful corruption in the world.
- C. I’d like to live a useful and fruitful life.
- D. I’d like to never stumble spiritually.

If you checked them all, you are like me. I want all of those things, too. I have good news for you: They are available to us!

❖ **Slowly read the following promise from the Bible. Circle the words that describe qualities God wants to add to your life.**

“His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. By these He has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... Therefore, brothers, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:3-10).

WOW! You’ve started the journey this week. You haven’t finished, you’ve just begun. Here are some next steps to take.

MONTH ONE

Bible Reading Plan

Use the following reading suggestions for the next 31 days. Read one chapter in your Bible each day. Think about what God is saying to you and talk to Him in prayer. Watch for ways to obey God's Word each day. As you read, watch for the following:

- What this reveals about God, His purposes, His ways
- What this reveals about yourself and your relationship to God
- Commands to obey; promises to claim; verses to memorize
- Sins & errors to avoid; principles for living; examples to follow
- Prayers to pray; wisdom to share; truth to confess

Check off the chapters as you read them. If you miss a day, pick up where you left off. Draw near to the Lord your God, and He will draw near to you.

❖ Read about Jesus in the book of Mark in the New Testament:

- Mark 1 Mark 2 Mark 3 Mark 4 Mark 5
 Mark 6 Mark 7 Mark 8 Mark 9 Mark 10
 Mark 11 Mark 12 Mark 13 Mark 14 Mark 15
 Mark 16

❖ Read the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament:

- Exodus 20

❖ Read Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in the New Testament:

- Matthew 5 Matthew 6 Matthew 7

❖ Read some of people's favorite poems from the Old Testament:

- Psalm 1 Psalm 23 Psalm 51
 Psalm 100 Psalm 103 Psalm 139

❖ Read the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus (and to us) in the New Testament:

- Ephesians 1 Ephesians 2 Ephesians 3
 Ephesians 4 Ephesians 5

In coming months read Acts, Matthew, Luke, John, Romans and other books of the New Testament.