

COMING HOME

An Invitation to Join God's Family



**RUSHING OFF TO WORK ... COMING HOME WEARY ...
PAYING THE BILLS ... RAISING THE KIDS ...**

.....

It often seems like an endless cycle. But during the quiet moments, do you dare to be honest with yourself? Have you ever wondered, “Is this all there is to life? Is it merely a 70-year cycle of eating and sleeping, of getting and spending, of growing older and older?”

If your heart longs for Something—or Someone—to bring meaning to your existence, we’ve got good news for you. There is a better way—a way to live that brings deep and genuine satisfaction. In the pages that follow, we’ll take a straightforward look at the things people value in this world and find out what they’re actually worth. In the process, you’ll learn that nothing is more valuable than a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And by joining God’s family, you’ll discover what life—a life of victory and true fulfillment—is really all about.

.....

It had been nearly two years. In minutes he’d be back, and he wondered what it would be like. He had written ahead—they knew he was coming. In his memory, he heard the squeak of Dad’s chair, the metal clang of spoon and pan in the kitchen, the crackle and thump as a log slipped in the fireplace. He could almost smell the sweet aroma of dinner nearly done. Then Mom would call, and everyone would scramble to the table.

IT WAS GOOD THEN. He belonged. BUT NOW?

Tom snapped out of his daydream with a sigh and turned into the lane. Familiar sights and sounds engulfed him. Ten strides and three steps ... warped wooden porch floor and white clapboard walls ... the creaky swing.

He rang the bell. The door swung open, and loving arms pulled him close. Then, with his tears soaking into her white sweater, from beneath grey hair and wrinkled brow, came the words he longed to hear:

“WELCOME HOME, son. WELCOME HOME!”

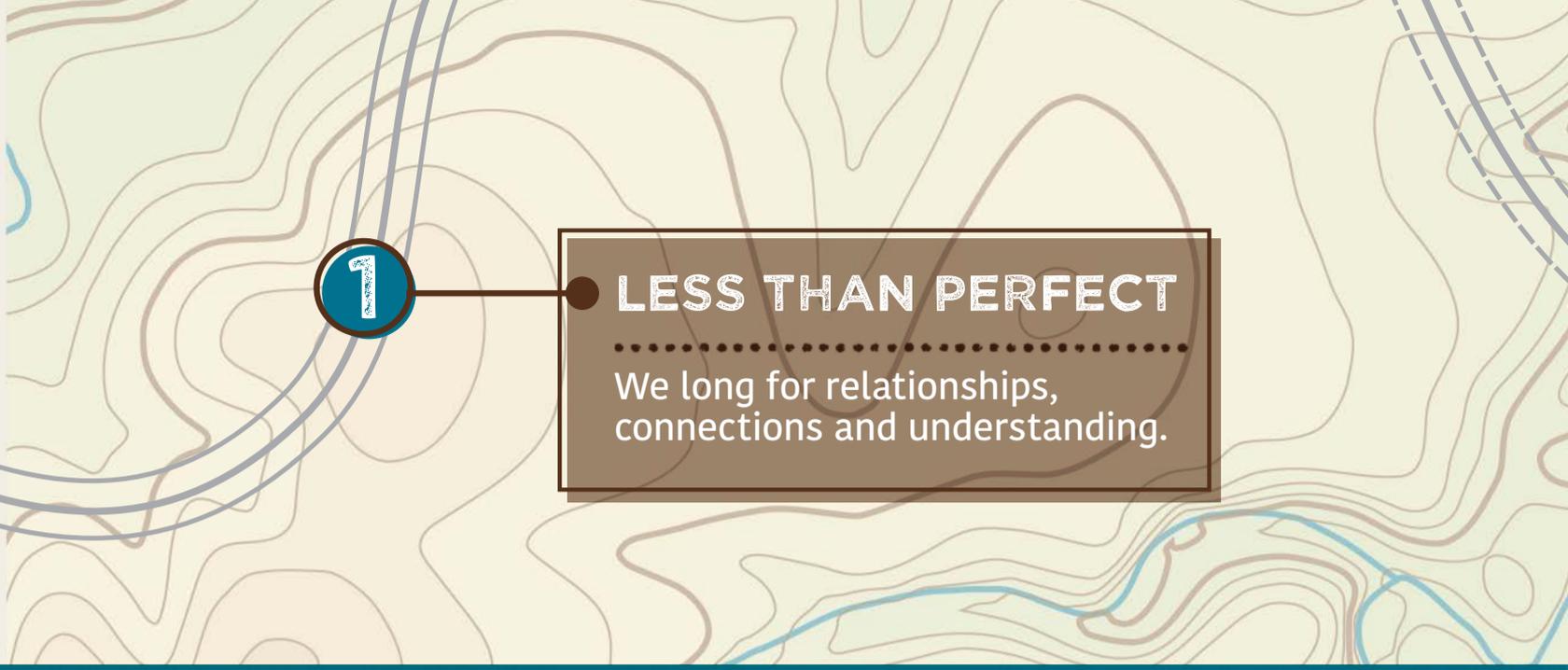
All people long for a place where they are welcome, accepted, and loved. Where they don't have to pretend or be on their guard. Where just being there is a cause for celebration. Warm, relaxing, open—that's home. Or at least that's the Norman Rockwell portrayal of it.

ALL PEOPLE
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ACCEPTED,
AND LOVED.



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1

LESS THAN PERFECT

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We long for relationships,
connections and understanding.

1

LESS THAN PERFECT

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But not all homecomings evoke such memories. And while coming home is often accompanied by high expectations, it rarely lives up to its advertising. Cousin Cheryl is late and the turkey dries out.

Nephew Norbert gets violently ill at the table. Uncle Arthur and Brother Bob argue about politics. A giant dust ball rolls out from under the sofa at Aunt Agatha's feet, and Sister Samantha hints that her children are better behaved than yours.

It can be much worse, of course. Some homes don't provide the loving support they should. A frightened boy listens from beneath his bedcovers as the shouting of his angry parents shatters the night air. A young girl dreads the end of the school day because Mom will almost certainly be drunk again. A soldier or prisoner fears that during his absence his wife has been unfaithful. A single mother tries to shut out the department store Christmas music this first

December since her divorce and her mother's death. And a homeless woman has no place, not even a hotel room, to call home.

We long for relationships, connections, continuity, understanding, communication—things we imagine people had in abundance a hundred years ago before big corporations, automobiles and housing developments made it easy for extended families to fragment and scatter across the country.

We feel **ISOLATED** and **ALONE**.

WHEN HOME
does not live up to
OUR DREAMS
or expectations,
WE GROW
RESTLESS.





2

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

We may be lonely, but we are not alone.

2

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

We may be lonely, but we are not alone. A lot of people today feel far from home. Perhaps they are divorced or widowed. Maybe they live hundreds of miles from their parents, siblings and cousins. Even if they love their families dearly, they are often so busy working, commuting and running errands that they have little time to spend with the people closest to them. They long for home and family, a place to be and become. But the kind of home they crave seems as improbable as a 1945 *Saturday Evening Post* cover.

We may be **LONELY,**
but **WE ARE NOT ALONE.**

It's harsh, but true. Nobody ever finds, inherits or lives in a perfect home where the people always listen to and understand each other, love and accept, or even like each

other. And yet most of us keep looking for just that—a place where we are appreciated, where we can be comfortable, where we can truly be ourselves.

Are we doomed to a lifetime of **SEARCHING WITHOUT FINDING?**

Must we become disillusioned and cynical? Or are we perhaps, in the words of the song, “looking for love in all the wrong places”?





3

RESTLESS HEARTS

Even the best of homes cannot bring peace to restless hearts.

3

RESTLESS HEARTS

More than 1,500 years ago, St. Augustine diagnosed the situation of many searching people. He knew from personal experience what it meant to be far from family, to try—and fail—to find love in a chain of short relationships, to feel as if nobody really cared. Speaking to God, he said, **“You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”**

If St. Augustine was right, our unfulfilled longings might not be satisfied even if we were able to stage a whole succession of perfect homecomings, flawless Thanksgiving dinners and harmonious family reunions. As wonderful as home can be, even the best of homes cannot bring peace to our restless hearts. We always need something deeper and broader than the love of a father or mother, brother or sister, husband or wife.

We would like to have parents, siblings and spouses who are always there for us and who are able to meet all our

needs: provide for us, listen to us, care for us, counsel us, discipline us, protect us and enjoy us. We'd like these "super people" to know us inside and out, to love us all the same, to give to us generously and to keep all their promises. We don't want these people ever to grow old or get sick or die. We want them to share our experiences, stick up for us, teach us what they know, and never say "I told you so."

**GOD "DESIRES ALL PEOPLE TO BE SAVED
and to come to the knowledge of the truth."**

—1 Timothy 2:4

Impossible? It sounds like it. But God has all these characteristics. He strongly desires to make all people part of His family—a family that will one day be perfect and last forever.

**HE STRONGLY
desires to make
ALL PEOPLE
part of his family.**





● THE IDEAL FATHER

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God is far greater than any human father could ever be.

4

4

THE IDEAL FATHER

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Let's back up for a minute. To understand God's invitation to join His family, it's important to know who God is.

The Bible paints this picture of Him:

In many ways, God is like an excellent human father. He loves His children and is pleased when they love Him in return. He provides for them and protects them. He gives guidance and, when necessary, punishment. He understands their limitations and is quick to forgive. Above all, He is generous (the Bible calls His generosity grace).

Above all, **HE IS GENEROUS.**

“THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL, and his mercy is over all that he has made.” —Psalm 145:9

In other ways, God is far greater than any human father could ever be. For one thing, He is all-powerful. Nothing can

keep Him from helping His children. For another, He is all-loving.

In God there is no selfishness or pride to interfere with His relationship with His children.

God is also all-knowing, so His guidance is completely worthy of trust. Since God is present everywhere at once, His children never have to strike out on their own, and since He is eternal, they never fear being abandoned.

In other ways, GOD is
FAR GREATER
than any human
FATHER could
EVER BE.



5

WHY DO PEOPLE SUFFER?

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God is the supreme ruler, but He is not the only influence.

5

WHY DO PEOPLE SUFFER?

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The Bible's description of God the Father is extremely attractive, but it raises some very difficult questions.

If a heavenly Father really exists, and if He really satisfies people's deepest longings, why is the world full of unhappy people?

What kind of father would let his children get hurt, suffer and die? How can anyone watch the news and seriously say that the universe is run by a loving Father?

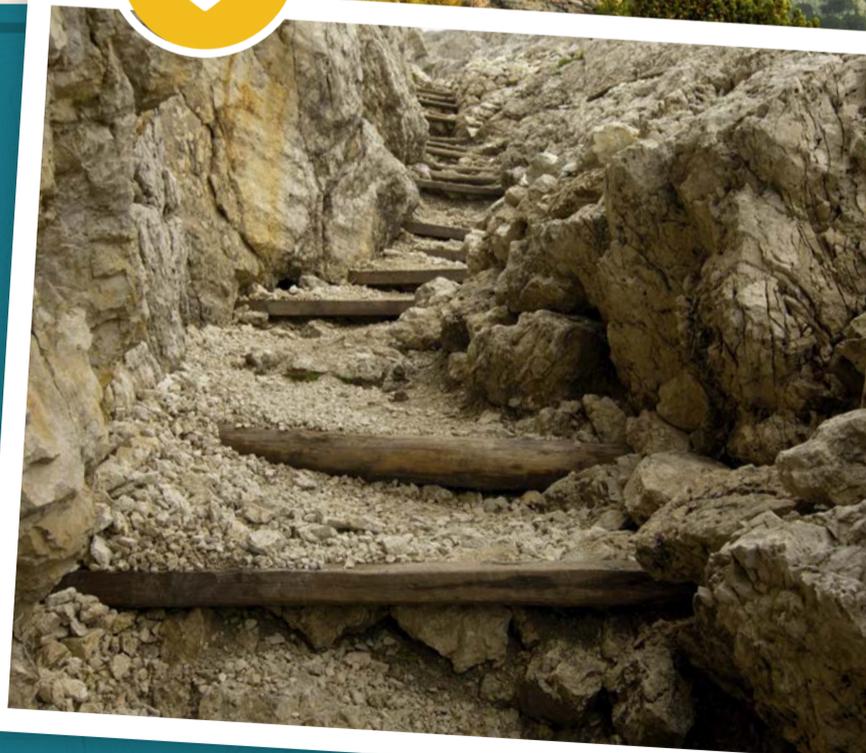
GOD IS THE SUPREME RULER,
but He is not the only supernatural power in the universe.

“THE LORD SAW that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” —*Genesis 6:5*

The answer is that creation has fallen because of human sin. In other words, the world as we see it today is not the world as the Creator made it in the beginning. That's because mankind has deliberately turned away from God (for more details, read Genesis Chapter 3). Ever since Adam and Eve made this terrible choice in the Garden of Eden, the world has existed in an abnormal state. That's why we have disease and disasters, hatred and war, birth defects and broken relationships. It's also the reason God had to send His Son into the world to save it.

HE HAS A BETTER PLAN, and He's in the process of working it out.

WHAT KIND
of father would let
HIS CHILDREN
get hurt, or
SUFFER?



6

GOD, LOVE AND RELATIONSHIP

God has always ruled the universe through love.

6

GOD, LOVE AND RELATIONSHIP

If God is a powerful and loving Father, **WHY DOESN'T HE DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE MESS ON EARTH?**

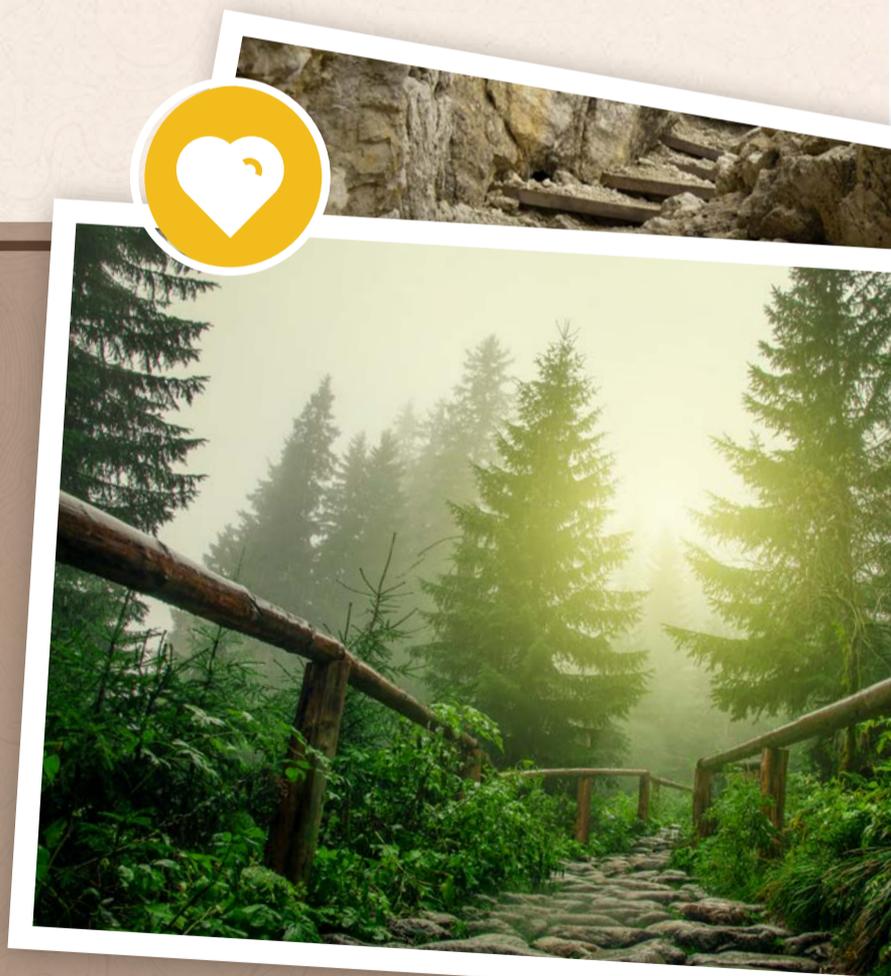
Actually, He has already done something amazing. God is love, and love pursues relationship. Relationship is central to all of His dealings with mankind. And real relationship is impossible unless both parties enter into it freely and willingly. It implies the possibility of brokenness and pain. As in any meaningful human relationship, so in our relationship with the Creator, genuine love takes time and can't be forced. It has to emerge in response to the love and grace He has already shown us.

“BUT GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR US in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” —*Romans 5:8*

As the Bible puts it, **“WE LOVE
because HE FIRST LOVED US.”**

By sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins,
God took the initiative. He stepped in to deliver the human
race from the effects of sin and death.

**BY SENDING
JESUS CHRIST
to die on the cross
FOR OUR SINS,
GOD TOOK
the INITIATIVE.**



7

CHOOSE LIFE

Jesus brought life and He still offers it.

7

CHOOSE LIFE

The Bible's New Testament tells the story of God's love for His children: **God sent His Son to Earth as a human being to undo Adam's tragic mistake, to choose life for the human race where Adam chose death!**

Jesus, who was at the same time completely man and entirely God, was born to the Virgin Mary, worked quietly in a carpenter's shop until He turned 30 and then began a three-year career of teaching and healing. The crowds loved Him, but the religious and political leaders were afraid of His growing influence.

They conspired to have Him executed one Friday afternoon in the spring, and Jesus died on a cross just outside the capital city limits.

The religious and political leaders would have been happy if the story had ended there, but it didn't. Early Sunday morning, Jesus burst back into life again and walked out of

the tomb, right past the soldiers posted by the entrance to prevent Jesus' friends from stealing His body (See *Matthew 28:1-7*).

He appeared to His closest friends, to His family, to several groups of awestruck followers—in all, to hundreds of people who were well aware that He had died a horrible death only days before.

Christians understand that Jesus died in their place—that in some indescribable way, He took the sins of the world on His shoulders and suffered for us. Jesus died the death that Adam, and all the rest of us, deserve as fallen human beings.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He broke the power of sin and brought us life. No longer were people forced to choose death. No longer was the planet certain to decay and die. Jesus brought life, and He offered it—in fact, He still offers it—to anyone who has faith in Him:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. —John 3:16



8

COMING HOME

Faith is a willingness to take the first step toward Jesus.

8

COMING HOME

What is faith? It is knowing that things are not as they seem, that Christ has defeated sin and death, and that God is indeed a loving Father who plans to gather His family around Him one day. Beyond this, faith is the willingness to take the first step toward Jesus, to trust that His love is an accurate reflection of God's love, to begin following in His footsteps and loving other people with a love like His.

A Christian is simply a person who has felt a need to come home, who has seen the loving Father through Jesus, who has said NO to sin and rebellion and YES to Jesus' invitation to choose life—unending life that begins now and continues forever with God. The Bible teaches that we are present—alive—spiritually with God at the moment we die, and that one day we will be alive in body again as well. That is why we say Christians have an eternal life.

9

WHAT MUST I DO?

Through the Lord, you can know and experience God's love.

9

WHAT MUST I DO?

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. —Revelation 3:20

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. —John 14:6

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. —Ephesians 2:8-9

You can become a Christian right now—you can come home—by opening the door to Christ and trusting Him as Lord and Savior. It is so simple a child can do it; yet, at the same time, it is hard because we first have to realize that we cannot do it on our own. Jesus said that to enter the Kingdom of Heaven a person must be willing to humble himself as a child. Only then will God receive him.

HOW ABOUT YOU? Are you ready to make this commitment?

All it takes are three simple steps. But first, you should stop and think about the cost of serving Christ and consider these steps very carefully. Acknowledge that you are a sinner separated from God.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

—Romans 3:23

All of us were created to have fellowship with God, but, because of humankind's stubborn self-will, we have chosen to go our own independent way. No amount of good deeds on our part can win God's favor. Agree with God that you are a lost sinner unable to save yourself. You need a Savior to bring yourself back to God. Understand that God is holy. No sin will ever enter His presence, for *"righteousness and judgement are the foundation of His throne."* —Psalm 97:2

Agree that Jesus Christ is the only provision for your salvation. Through the Lord, you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life. You must believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins, and know that He wants to be your Lord as well as your Savior. He wants to take possession of your heart and rule in it so that from now on, His Word is law to you.

THROUGH THE LORD, you can know and experience **GOD'S LOVE AND PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE.**

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. —John 1:12

Truly desire to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and ask Him to come into your heart. You should understand that when you receive Christ, you experience a new birth. You do this by turning from self to God (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into your life to forgive your sins and to make you the kind of person He wants you to be. You receive the Lord by faith through prayer, as an act of the will. You must also confess that Jesus Christ is Lord before men.

If you confess with your mouth that 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. —Romans 10:9

Remember, God is concerned with the attitude of your heart. If you clearly understand what Christ accomplished on the cross and have considered carefully the demands He makes of you, there is nothing to stop you from becoming a Christian.

Now you should go where you can be alone or in the presence of another Christian, get on your knees before God and **PRAY A SIMPLE PRAYER SUCH AS THIS:**



Lord Jesus Christ,
I NEED YOU.

I agree that I am a sinner and have sinned in my thinking and speaking and acting. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I have counted the cost of following You. I repent and turn away from my past sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

AMEN.

10

WHAT NEXT?

Because Jesus rose from the dead, those who trust Him will too.

10

WHAT NEXT?

The Bible uses two terms to describe what happens when people say “YES” to God and join His family. This experience, which was explained earlier, is being born again. New Christians are part of God’s family just as certainly as they are part of their earthly parents’ family. He is their Father, and they are His children (See *John 3:3-8*).

The other term used to describe this relationship is adoption. Even though all humans are born in a condition that inevitably leads to death, Christians are adopted into God’s family and given all the inheritance rights of God’s Son. Because Jesus rose from the dead, those who trust in Him will too.

“FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” —*Jeremiah 29:11*

His children also have hope. Because Christians are part of God’s family, they can feel completely secure. He will

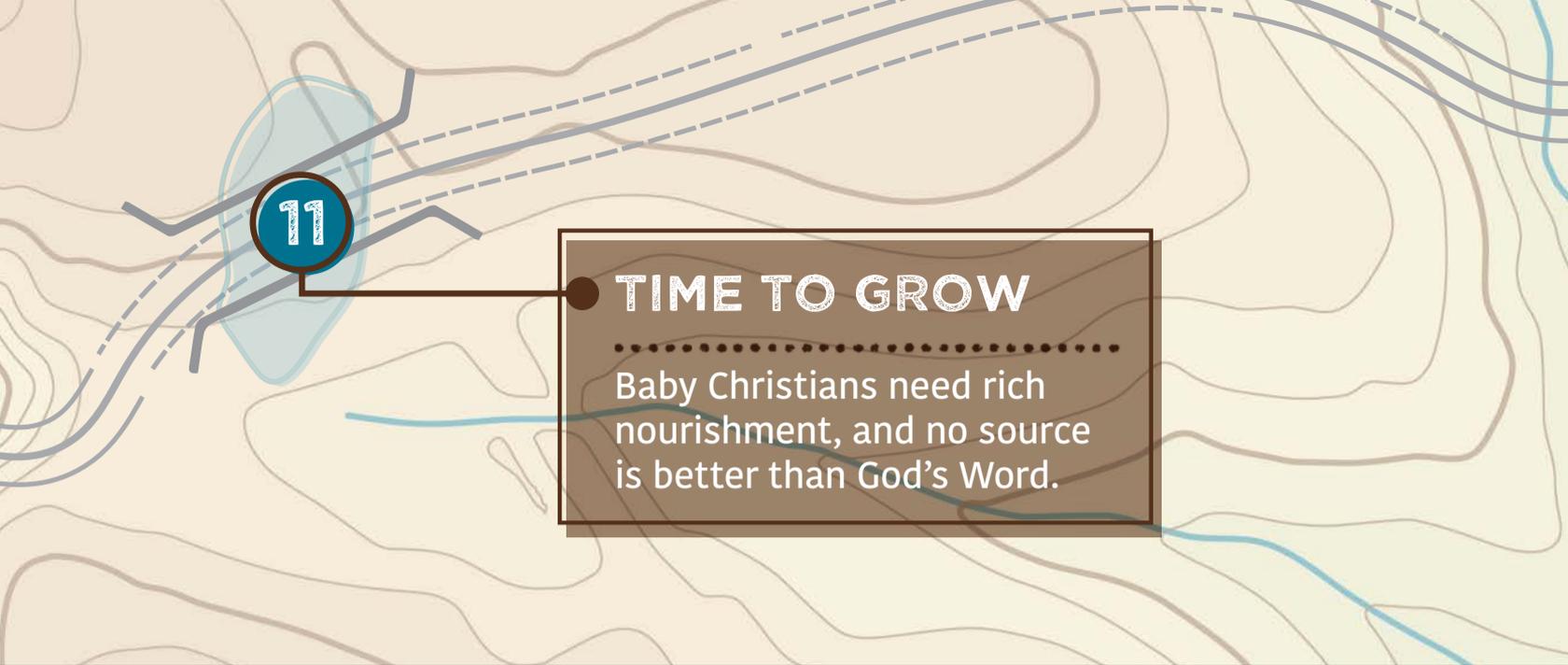
not disown them or rewrite His will. He has promised to be faithful to His children, and **God always keeps His promises.**

As children of God, Christians can have power—power to follow Jesus even when the way is hard, power to make Jesus known to others, power to love and to serve.

His children also have hope. No longer will they fear that death will ruin their plans and destroy their relationships. Instead, they have confidence that God will raise them to life in a new world where all is life and peace and joy.

Since Christians have opened the door to Christ and have come home to God, they have acquired a new set of spiritual brothers and sisters—God’s other children on earth. It is important for God’s family to meet together regularly. As God’s church with God’s power, we can expect God to be at work.





11

TIME TO GROW

Baby Christians need rich nourishment, and no source is better than God's Word.

11

TIME TO GROW

People begin life in God's family just as they began it in their parents' family—as babies. Baby Christians need to be nurtured, protected, taught and loved.

Now you're ready to read God's Word! If you need help getting started, try these suggestions:

- To learn more about God's love for His children, *read the short book of 1 John, near the back.*
- To get better acquainted with Jesus, your Savior, *read one or more of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.*
- To understand more about how Jesus' death and resurrection means life for you, *read Romans.*
- To praise God for inviting you into His family, *read some of the Psalms (start with Psalm 100).*

WAYS TO BE NURTURED

Here are a few suggestions that will help you get the care and guidance you need as you begin to grow in your faith:

TELL A FRIEND. Do you know someone who might get excited about the decision you've made—a pastor, maybe, or Christian friend? Tell him or her (through a visit, call or email). Share the joy of your new commitment with someone else!

Baby Christians need to be **NURTURED,**
PROTECTED, TAUGHT
and **LOVED.**

READ THE BIBLE. Baby Christians need rich nourishment, and no source is better than God's Word. The Bible is God's message to mankind, so it's vital for young believers to know what it says. You can get started by looking up and reading the verses in this booklet. After that, we'd suggest that you make a habit of reading a chapter a day, beginning with the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)—they'll help you get better acquainted with Jesus.

Next you could take a look at Paul's letter to the Philippians and the letters of James and John. To understand more about how Jesus' death and resurrection means life for you, read Paul's letter to the Romans. If you have questions, a pastor or Christian friend will be able to help you in your Bible study. If you

don't have a Bible, please contact us and we'll be happy to send you one.

TALK TO GOD REGULARLY. Make prayer a habit. This means talking to God about anything, at any time of the day or night. It also means spending a “quiet” time with Him, where you meditate on His Word, tell Him of your love and devotion, and talk to Him about others and their needs. In any relationship, communication is vital.

“THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” –Acts 2:42

GET INVOLVED IN A CHURCH. Churches are where God's people gather to worship Him together, learn from the Bible, encourage each other and welcome new believers into God's family. Find a church near you that does these things, and get involved. Your church should believe that the Bible is the accurate Word of God, that Jesus Christ is God's Son, that He is fully God and man, and that only through faith in Jesus Christ can a person have eternal life. You will still have many questions as you begin your new life with God and His family of believers, but now you know the One who has the answers.

12

THE IDEAL FAMILY

No earthly homecoming can compare to the joy of COMING HOME to God.

12

THE IDEAL FAMILY

Homecoming can be a joyous time, even if the pumpkin pie crust is soggy and Great Uncle Herbert has forgotten his table manners. But no earthly homecoming, no matter how memorable, can compare with the joy of coming home to God. God's love, after all, is the source of all earthly love. It is stronger and more enduring than love between husband and wife, parent and child, brothers and sisters. At the same time, God's love strengthens our human ties and increases our love for those dear to us.

GOD'S LOVE, after all,
is the source of **ALL EARTHLY LOVE.**

“SEE WHAT KIND OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN TO US, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” —1 John 3:1

This booklet explains why all human beings need God's love. It explains how to respond to His invitation and become part of His family. But there is one thing it cannot do:

It cannot say “YES” TO GOD for you.

If your heart is restless, if you find yourself longing for a home you've never known, if you would like eternal life with Jesus that begins now and continues in heaven where there is no suffering, sin or death—say YES to Jesus.

Join the family. COME HOME.



WOULD YOU LIKE TO
PRAY WITH SOMEONE?

call : 800-232-6459

OR IN CANADA
call 1-800-661-9800



Helping Families Thrive™

Focus on the Family
8605 Explorer Dr.
Colorado Springs, CO 80920

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