

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

Let me be the first to welcome you, to the family of God! I want to congratulate you on making the best choice you will ever make in your life, which is to commit your life to Jesus. I'm sure you have lots of questions and perhaps some concerns. To help with that, we created this booklet to share some basic concepts and principles with you that will help you experience all that God has for you. There are literally volumes of information and teaching that is available to us today to help us all grow in our relationship with God, but we wanted to keep this simple and give you three things that will really help you get going. As you read through this booklet, keep something in mind: it's ok to ask questions. Questions mean you are thinking about things and taking it seriously, so we want you to ask questions! We are all so excited that you have made the greatest decision in your life and we are excited to be a part of your story!

Three Keys to Victory in Your New Walk with Christ

1. Know it Means to be a "Christian"

The term "Christian" has become a pretty loaded term. To some it means something good, while others cringe as it conjures up thoughts of someone they've had a bad experience with. Whatever thoughts and labels people attach to it, the term "Christian" is simply one who follows Christ. This means that being a Christian is about having a relationship with Jesus Christ rather than following a list of rules, regulations, or practices. In the New Testament book of II Corinthians 5:17, it says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold all things have become new." That means, that when you ask Jesus to come into your life, forgive you, and be your savior, he instantly changed your heart and your spirit, and you became a part of his family.

The term "in Christ" has a lot of deep meanings to it, but for now I want to focus on the meaning of relationship. If you are in Christ, you are in relationship with him. He is now not only your savior but your friend, your helper, your comfort, your peace, and your protection. In fact, anything that you will ever need can be found in him. In the book of John chapter three, Jesus is having a discussion with a man named Nicodemus. Jesus told him in verse three that unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This obviously confused Nicodemus since he was a grown man and knew that he could not be physically born again. So Jesus continued to explain in verse five, "I say to you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Now, what Jesus was saying is that we are all born of water. That's natural birth, but then we need to be born again, that's spiritual birth. Jesus went on to say in verse six, 'That which is

born of the flesh is flesh." That's our natural birth. "And that which is born of the spirit is spirit." That's our new birth. So when you gave your heart to Jesus, you were "born again." You had a spiritual birth, you became spiritually alive to God. Joining a church is important. Having a pastor is important. Continuing to learn more and more about God and his word is important, but all of those things do not make you a Christian. You become a Christian when you invite Jesus into your life and become born again.

There will be days when you don't feel like a Christian. There will be days that you don't feel that God is pleased with you or even loves you, but don't focus on how you feel, focus on what you know. You know that you prayed and asked Jesus to accept you, and he did. You know that he loves you regardless of any failure.

2. You Need to Grow

Just like with the spiritual birth, I'm not talking about physical growth, but spiritual growth. Remember, you have been born again, spiritually and just like any newborn you need to grow. In I Peter 2:2, we read, "As newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow..." The "word" there is the Bible. So one of the ways in which you grow spiritually is by reading your Bible. I have been serving God for over fifty years now, and each morning, I start my day by reading the Bible. Even though I've read it through many times, I still need the spiritual food it gives me. I've eaten fried eggs many times, but I still want them every morning when I get up. Why? Because my physical body needs the energy. The same is true of your spirit. You need the spiritual energy that God's word gives you. The Bible calls it faith. In Romans 10:17, we read that faith comes by hearing the word of God. So when I read it, I hear it, it produces faith. Reading your Bible each day is the first step in growing spiritually, but it is not your only step.

The other very important step in your growth spiritually is to develop a daily habit of talking to God and listening to God. That's what we call prayer. Prayer is not just reciting words, but opening up your heart and mind to God. Prayer is simply communication. The more you communicate with God, the stronger and deeper your relationship with him will be. So spend time each day talking with God and also listening to him. Now here's a simple way to pray.

1. Start with thanking him for your life and his love to you and all the wonderful things around you. Even if things aren't going super right now for your life, begin to thank God for the things you are enjoying.
2. Next, let him know what is on your heart, whether it's a problem you're facing or a need that you have or perhaps a question about his word or direction for your life. Ask him to show you anything in your life where you need to ask for forgiveness.
3. Then I encourage you to pray for others, your family, friends, co-workers, and whoever comes to your mind. I would finish by once again, thanking God for his guidance and grace to help you have a blessed day and be a blessing to others.

Remember, prayer is simply talking with God, so relax and have a great visit. It's just like any relationship. If you don't talk to God, you'll walk from God.

3. Connect With Other Christians

The best way to connect with other Christians is to be a part of a local church family and with a smaller group within that church family that you can experience life with. When it comes to connecting with others, there are two very important things I've learned through the years.

First, the quality of your life will be determined by the choices you make and the company you keep. The people who have significant influence in your life, the people that we surround ourselves with will have a powerful influence on us and the choices we make. They can encourage or discourage us, they can help us to reach our dreams and goals or they can sabotage our dreams and goals. At Cape First, we have several Life Groups to get you started on this journey of building relationships.

The second important thing I've learned is that your resources are in your relationships. God did not create us to be islands. In fact, in Hebrews 10:24-25, we read, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." In other words, don't forsake getting together as a church family. Being a part of a life-giving church family will help you to know and grow. It will provide the relationships that can encourage you and even help you to make right decisions, through learning opportunities, as well as serving opportunities; you can fulfill God's purpose in your life in your local church.

There are some people who say they don't need to go to church to be a Christian. That's kind of like saying, I don't need to get into water to swim. Well, yes you do. It all goes together to produce the incredible experience that God calls life. So get in a good church. And if you live around the southeast Missouri area, I invite you to be a part of our church family.

Our entire church family is so excited that you have made the decision to follow Christ!

He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces.
Psalm 107:14