
first
steps
Beginning Your Journey with Jesus
FAITHWORKS
Scott Pauley

first steps



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first steps

Beginning Your Journey with Jesus

Scott Pauley

FAITHWORKS MEDIA



Dedicated to
Mary Sue Coley

who took the time to
answer my questions and
point me to Jesus.

A resource from...

ENJOYING THE Journey

First Edition, First Printing

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Introduction

Welcome to the Journey!

Many years ago I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I can tell you that following Him and walking with Him every day has become the greatest adventure of my life. We are thrilled that you have now begun your journey with Jesus.

The moment that you trust Christ to be your Savior, you are given eternal life. Jesus said in John 17:3, "*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*" To know God through His Son is to have eternal life. Eternal life is our present possession and it assures us of our eternal home.

Though your final destination is settled, you have just begun a lifelong journey with Jesus, and God has so much more for you. The journey of life is made one step at a time. If you desire to move forward in your faith, then you must begin where you are! Determine to take the next step with God today.

This resource was designed to guide you as you take your first steps in the right direction. Read this book with your Bible near, and take the time to look up each Scripture reference. This will help you to get better acquainted with your Bible and will give you a greater understanding of how to apply the truth. You may find additional tools at www.ETJ.Bible.

It is our prayer that, as you walk with us through God's Word, you will discover the joy of journeying with Jesus each day. Welcome to the Journey!

Your fellow traveler,



Scott Pauley
Enjoying The Journey

The Path Ahead

In these few pages, we will follow the first steps of arguably the greatest Christian who ever lived: the Apostle Paul. There are no *perfect* Christians, including Paul. Paul was a sinner. He even referred to himself as the chief of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15. In Romans 7, he described the battle that he (like all of us) faced with sin. But Paul was a true follower of Jesus Christ, and an example to follow for all of us.

None of us will be perfect until we get to Heaven. Those who know Christ will receive a new body and will be free of the old sin nature that we battle each day (1 Corinthians 15:52-55; 1 John 3:2). In Heaven, the Devil will no longer tempt us, and the old world will never again distract us. But until that day, we have one goal: ***to pursue Christ.***

This study will help you to follow Paul in the pursuit of Christ. We must approach the spiritual journey of the Apostle Paul with this thought: "How can I become more like the Lord Jesus?"

First Steps are Important

We begin our examination of the life of Saul, who later became known as Paul, in Acts 9. This chapter describes Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. It was at this time that Saul came to know Jesus Christ in a personal way. This was the beginning of his journey with Jesus.

The chapter opens with a picture of a man who was far from where he needed to be. He is moving in the wrong direction!

> *"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem"* (Acts 9:1-2).

Saul, filled with hatred and sin, was an enemy of Christ when his journey began. In fact, sin makes all of us enemies of Jesus (Romans 5:10; 8:7-9; Colossians 1:21). This is the beautiful truth of salvation. The Lord meets us where we are, and loves us too much to leave us there! When we come to know Christ, He begins to lead us to where we need to be. He has taken the first step toward us and we must now take the next step with Him.

Becoming a believer is not the end; it is merely the starting point. Jesus described salvation in terms of *the new birth* (John 3) because **salvation is the beginning of new life.** It is the start of a spiritual journey with your Creator.

I remember when each of our children started walking. Their first steps were so exciting, but they were just that — the first steps. It would be unreasonable if my wife and I had rejoiced in their birth and first steps and then put them back in a crib and said, "We got that behind us!" That is not normal. Parents are to nurture and care for their children. They help them take their first steps, watch over them as they start walking on their own, and then guide them as they begin their own path in life. The same thing is true in the Christian life.

Being born again (the spiritual birth) is the starting point. But you must not stop there. Every child of God should begin to take the next step, and then the next, and the one after that. Birth must be followed by growth.

The first steps set the direction for the entire journey. Each step you take provides strength to take the next. Like a child: the more you walk, the more strength you gain. The more you follow Jesus and obey Him, the more strength He provides. As you obey Him, He gives direction to know the next step for your life.

Some people want to know what they are supposed to do for the rest of their lives, but they will not do what Jesus told them to do today. You cannot take the fourth and fifth steps if you do not take the first three, because God is a God of order and progression. If you want to fulfill the purpose that God placed you on earth to fulfill, take the next step on your journey with Jesus.

"As He Journeyed"

In every journey, you must chart your course, and ensure that your steps follow the right pattern. Perhaps you recently trusted Christ and do not know where to begin. You may have known Christ for some time but are unsure if you are moving in the right direction. These truths are for you.

Acts 9:3 says, *"And **as he journeyed**, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:"*

Everything hinges on a little phrase that is easily overlooked. It is the first part of verse 3: *"as he journeyed."* It was *as he journeyed* that Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. It was *as he journeyed* that he saw the light from Heaven. It was *as he journeyed* that God spoke to him. It was all *as he journeyed!* God places roadblocks of mercy along the way. He creates divine detours to redirect our path.

All of Paul's life seems to be one big journey. It is estimated that Paul walked 30,000 miles on foot on Roman roads during his lifetime. No cars, no trains, no planes. Just walking on dusty roads. Throughout his ministry, he traveled by Mediterranean shipping routes throughout the world. In fact, there are three distinguishable "missionary journeys" of the Apostle Paul. His whole life was a journey. So is yours.

When Saul first met Jesus, it was while he was on a journey. As he was walking along the path, the Lord met him right where he was. At that moment, Jesus changed the whole direction of the path that he was on. Now instead of pursuing *his goals*, he would pursue *Christ*. Here is the crux of the Christian life. The most important journey in the world is your own personal journey with Jesus.

Do not do what you want to do with your life. Do not do what others think you should do with your life. Instead ask, "What does God want for me?" And then purpose in your heart that you are going to begin to follow Him right where you are, until the day that you see Him face to face.

The goal is not to make a decision for Christ, but to be a true disciple of Christ. This is not a special event, or single decision — it is a way of life. It is a journey with Jesus.

The Bible teaching ministry God has given me is called *Enjoying the Journey*, and while we know we are going to enjoy the destination in Heaven, we believe that God has designed us to enjoy the journey with Him.

How do you enjoy the journey? You enjoy the journey *with Jesus*, knowing the companionship of Christ. You walk with Him. If Christ has come to live in your life, He promised in Hebrews 13:5, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."* He said that His Spirit will be with you forever (John 14:16). Jesus said in Matthew 28:20, *"...lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."* Wherever you go, whatever you do, you are making the journey with Jesus Christ.

Whose Line are You In?

Before we identify the first steps of the Apostle Paul in Acts 9, read what he wrote to a group of believers in his day. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he said, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* The challenge is simple, "I am following Jesus. Get in line with me."

Every person is either following Adam – that is the first man, leading a long line of sinners – or you are following the One the Bible calls the second Adam, the perfect

Man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:12-21). Everybody is in somebody's line; whose line are you in? Paul said, "I am in Jesus' line. So why don't you get in line behind me and follow me as I follow Christ."

Sometimes, in a world of influencers, people get enamored by those they see from a distance on social media. You may watch a video clip, or read something and think, "They really have it all together." But when you get closer to reality, the person you held in high regard is often a disappointment. This is never the case with Christ! The closer you come to Jesus, the more of His goodness and perfection you will see. And the more you will want to be like Him.

I trusted Jesus as my Savior more than 40 years ago and have been studying the Bible for a long time. Though I have been on the path for many years, I am still on the journey. God is working on me. None of us has arrived yet. We are all following Jesus and fellow travelers on this road from earth to Heaven. Some of us may be further along than others, and you might be at a different mile marker than someone else, but we are all on the same path if we are pursuing Christ.

Paul, the Pattern

Paul explained this same truth to Timothy, his young protégé, in 1 Timothy 1:16. Paul shares a testimony of how Jesus saved him and changed his heart. This is his story, in his own words: *"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."*

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy..." I am glad that God shows mercy on us. If we did not have mercy, we would all either be in Hell or on our way to Hell. I am grateful that I am not there, and that I am never going there! It is the mercy of God alone that does not give us what we rightfully deserve as sinners.

"...that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." How could Paul say, "Follow me as I follow Christ?" Because in Paul, God gave a pattern, a model we all can follow.

In school, students study a variety of subjects. But in any field of study, the deepest understanding does not

come from mere book learning, academic exercise, and intellectual knowledge. Time in a lab, an apprenticeship, or internship "in the trenches" is most valuable to help the student begin to apply the truth learned. It is best to work with someone who has done this before because you are learning a working model, a correct pattern.

Paul is the pattern for all who desire to be true followers of Jesus Christ. Though he was unique, and God dealt with him uniquely (you are not going to have a road to Damascus "light from heaven" experience), the first steps are the same.

God Knows Your Name

Continue following Paul in Acts 9:3-4: *"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"*

Think of this: God called Saul by name. God knows you by name. Sometimes, we feel as though we are lost in the crowd. We think that we are just one of many. But you are not a number to God. God knows you by name. He knows everything there is to know about you.

Several times in Scripture God calls individuals by their name twice. In each instance, He was seeking to get their attention. *"Abraham, Abraham"* (Genesis 22:11). *"Jacob, Jacob"* (Genesis 46:2). *"Moses, Moses"* (Exodus 3:4). *"Samuel, Samuel"* (1 Samuel 3:10). *"Martha, Martha"* (Luke 10:41). *"Simon, Simon"* (Luke 22:31). Now, *"Saul, Saul."* When the Lord is trying to really get your attention, you know it.

Significantly, Saul's encounter with Jesus came "suddenly" from his perspective. It was unplanned and unexpected. But God had been preparing him all along for this moment. Long before Saul ever knew God, God knew him and had a divine purpose for his life.

God is Working in Your Life

Have you ever been at a point in life where you knew God was trying to wake you up? You did not know exactly what it was, but He was working to show you a much-needed truth. That is the starting point — the time to be alert. Get spiritually wide awake and say, "God is up to something in my life. What does He want to do?"

The Lord spoke to Saul in Acts 9:4-5. ***"Saul, Saul,*** *why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest:"* This is his personal encounter with the living Christ. Jesus had died, been buried, risen from the dead, and ascended back to Heaven. Now, He is appearing from glory (1 Corinthians 15:8). This light is not a flashlight or sunlight; it is God's light.

"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The Bible language here was well understood in that agricultural society. People moved oxen forward by the use of goads with sharp pointed edges. They would gently nudge or goad the animal to keep it moving forward. The Lord is saying, "I have been goading you. I have been trying to prick your heart, and instead of getting the hint and moving in my direction, you have been kicking against the pricks."

If an animal kicks against a goad, who is it hurting? The one doing the goading or the animal? God nudges us nearer to Him and points us in the direction He wants us to go. When we are rebellious, we are not hurting God. He is going to get His work done one way or another! Instead, we are hurting ourselves. Paul would later describe sinners who fight against God as *"those that oppose themselves"* (2 Timothy 2:25).

Saul held the coats of the murderers as the first Christian martyr was put to death. When Stephen was stoned, Saul was there "consenting" to his death (Acts 8:1). No doubt those memories haunted him. I believe God used even that to prepare his heart for the truth.

God is working in every part of your life - even the things that you have done, or have had done to you. There may be circumstances that you do not like and things you cannot understand. God works even through these difficulties in life to bring about good and to bring you in His direction. But it is not enough if you do not recognize it. Do not allow your past or present circumstances to be a wedge between you and God; instead, allow them to be the prod that pushes you nearer to Him.

God Wants You to Take the Next Step

Saul responded to the Lord in Acts 9:6 *"And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."*

This has always intrigued me, but when Saul asks the Lord what he is to do next, Jesus did not say, "I want you to become the apostle to the Gentiles. I want you to take three missionary journeys and start churches. And by the way, I am going to have you write most of the New Testament." God never gives you all of the details up front!

He simply says to him, "Get up, go to Damascus and sit there in a house. I am going to have someone come and tell you what to do next." He let him sit there for three days. If you will work at taking one step of obedience — the next step — God will show you the rest.

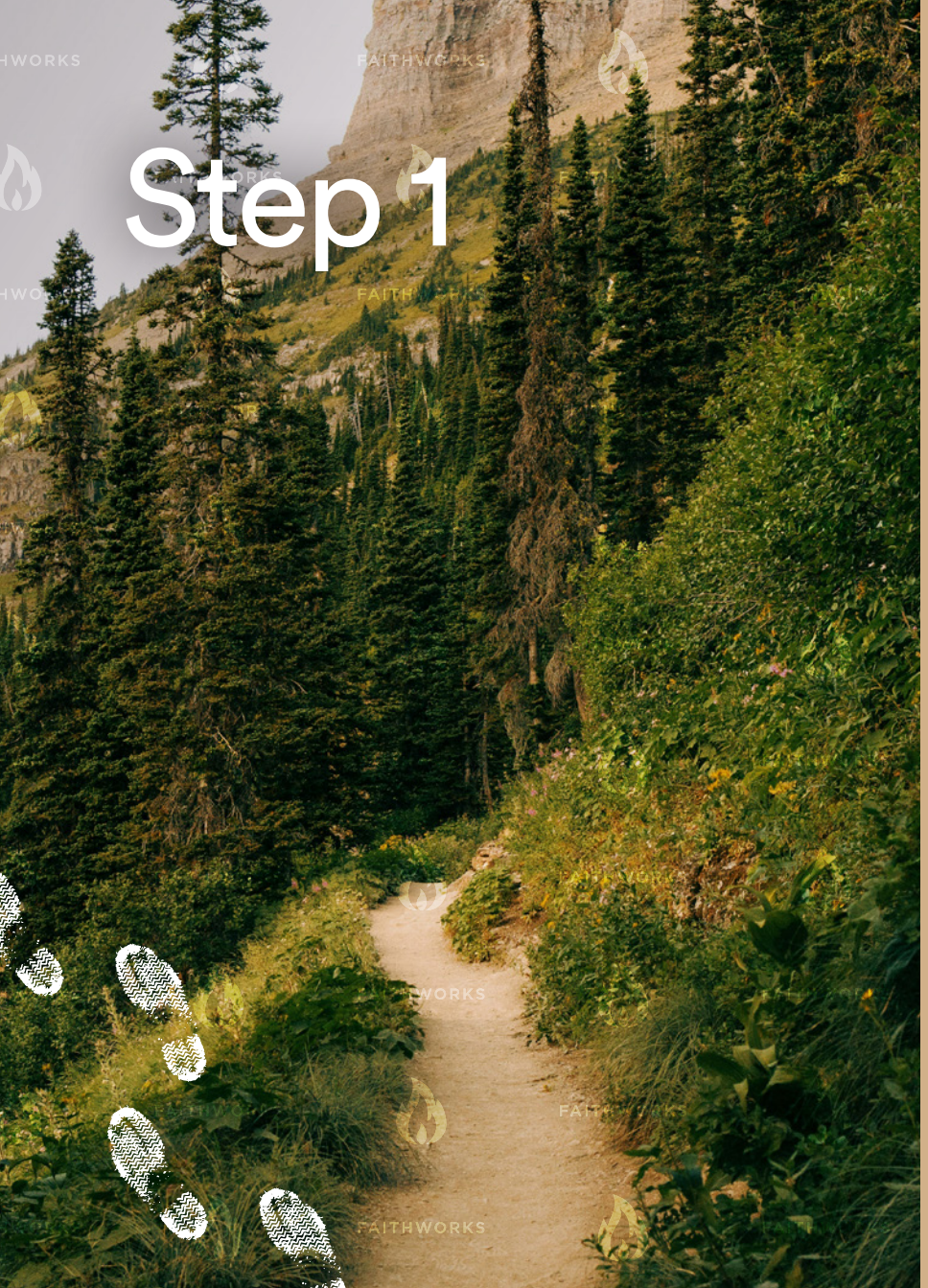
Perhaps you think of yourself as a planner. You may like to arrange all the details of your life – to organize the future so that you know what is coming. But God is not looking for planners, He is looking for followers. He is the Planner (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Sometimes, we want to negotiate with the Lord. "Lord, if you will tell me what you have in mind, we can discuss the details." God does not operate that way. The will of God never drops out of Heaven like a syllabus, a checklist, or a roadmap. Rather, it unrolls like an ancient scroll. You unroll a little bit to read it, and then a little more, and then a little more.

He never fills in all the blanks upfront. He shows you the next step, and when you do that, He shows you what is next. That is the opposite of what we think. We think, "I have to know it to do it." But in John 7:17, Jesus said *"If any man **will do** his will, he **shall know** of the doctrine..."* Do what you know and you will know what to do.

As you follow, God will lead. It is impossible to steer a parked car, but if a car is moving forward and has momentum, it can be steered. Take the next step on your journey with Jesus Christ, and as you do, He will direct, He will steer, and He will guide.





Come to Know Christ for Yourself

Step 1

Come to Know Christ for Yourself

The first step on your journey with Jesus is to know Christ as your personal Savior. *"Ye must be born again."* (John 3:7) New birth is not a gradual process. You may gradually come to know more about the gospel and understand more about the Bible. But there is a moment where you enter a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

Acts 9 records the moment of absolute surrender and faith in Saul's life. It was a moment of *repentance*. It was a moment of *acceptance*. It was a moment of *dependence*. It was Saul, who was the "big man in charge", with letters from the high priest, now saying, "I have nothing. Lord, what do you want me to do?"

Three Questions

Notice three questions in Acts 9:4-6. You may want to circle these three words in your Bible, because they describe the progression of life. Answer these three questions and you will know what to do.

In verse four, the Bible says, *"And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, **why** persecutest thou me?"*

Next, notice verse five: *"And he said, **Who** art thou, Lord? and the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."*

Finally, look at verse six: *"And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, **what** wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."*

The **why**, the **who**, and the **what**: these are the three great questions of life.

First of all, **why?** This question leads us to *reflection*. Consider your own life. What direction are you headed? Why are you living? Why are you studying or working? Why? Why are you giving your attention and energy to what you are giving it to?

Now go to the deepest part of your life, the spiritual. Why? Why are you consumed with that sin? Why are you in bondage? Why are you dominated by fear or controlled by others? Why?

Why does not give you all the answers — but it shows you that you need God to help you understand the answers. Everybody has a why, and it is time to think about it.

Then he moves from **why** to **who**. He moves from reflection to *revelation*. *"Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus."* Every man and woman must come to know who Jesus is for themselves. He is the Son of God and a living Savior. He wants to live in you. It is not enough to say He lives in Heaven. Does He live in your heart? We must know him personally.

Then the third question: **what.** Here is a *confession*. *"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* He is not merely asking for information. This is a moment of absolute submission. Saul was saying, "Whatever you tell me to do, the answer is yes." He uses an address of reverence when he calls Him "Lord." To this point, Saul was opposing Jesus and now he calls Him Lord! He believed on the risen Christ! The one he once fought against, he now confesses as the Lord.

This is the divine moment when Saul personally comes into a relationship with Jesus Christ. This did not answer all of his questions or fix all of his problems, but it gave him a vital connection to Jesus Christ.

Paul (formerly Saul) later described salvation to others: *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:9-10).

If you have never personally put your faith in Jesus — not in a general way, but in a specific way — to be your Savior, to save you from your sins, you have to start there. Nothing else matters and no further instruction will make

sense until you take the first step. The first step is salvation. (Read the *Enjoying the Journey* section in the back of this book for more help.)

Assurance

I came to Christ as a young boy, but as I got older, like many believers, I struggled through a period of tremendous doubts about my salvation. There were many factors that contributed to my lack of assurance. Because I had trusted Christ as my Savior as a young child, my memories were not extremely clear. And a "changed life?" I was no drug addict or criminal at five years of age!

My lack of assurance was like a dark cloud of doubt that had settled on my life, and the lights had gone out. It was the darkest time of my life spiritually. I began to question everything: God, the Bible, my salvation. Had I believed enough? Did I truly understand? Could I have failed to pray the right prayer? Everything reproduces after its own kind: questions only lead to more questions.

Satan loves to cause chaos and confusion in our minds. Sometimes you get bombarded by so many other ideas, and you have to work through them. Yes, I had made a profession of faith, but there came a moment when I had to drive a stake a mile deep in the ground about my own salvation. But how? I talked to every preacher I knew. I read through 1 John, that great assurance book, many times. I prayed repeatedly, but with no peace.

Permit me to share with you the two truths that brought me out of the shadows of defeat and into the light of victory.

Christ is Enough.

One of our Lord's apostles, Simon Peter, wrote, *"...make your calling and election sure:..."* (2 Peter 1:10). It is important that you make certain that you belong to Christ and that Christ belongs to you. For me, that did not happen by gaining more knowledge. One day sitting in a car by myself in a parking lot, I cried out, "Lord, I have a lot of questions and I am struggling. I have all these doubts. But I am going to trust that You are enough." Bells did not ring, lights did not flash, and I did not see a vision from Heaven, but there was a moment when the light did come on for me. What brought it was the sufficiency of Christ. I accepted by faith that Jesus is enough. And when I confessed that from my heart, it was like the lights came back on. It was wonderful!

The Scriptures plainly teach that, *"salvation is of the LORD."* (Jonah 2:9) There is no assurance in your prayer, your emotion, your logic, or your experience. The only confidence we have is that the work Jesus did at Calvary was all-sufficient. And my part? Only to look to Him!

Hebrews 12:2 gives the secret: *"Looking unto Jesus!"* The word used is a directional word – literally, look away from everything else and fix your eyes on Him alone. When I caught a glimpse of the cross and the love of God, peace came into my soul. Christ is enough.

When the devil brings accusations, take him to the cross and point him to Jesus. When the flesh brings questions, take it to the cross and show it to Jesus. Victory is found through *"the simplicity that is in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:3). All of my doubts were wrapped up in me; all of my peace was found in Him. Sometimes, life gets complicated. Sin complicates everything it touches. It is terrible. But do you know what cuts through the mess? Jesus Christ. That is why there is power in the name of Jesus. That is why there is liberty and joy in a personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus is enough.

My Greatest Assurance Is Not Past Tense – It Is Present Tense.

So many of my questions revolved around the event, the experience, the emotion on the day I invited Christ into my life. Yet salvation is a present possession and it produces present realities. Memories are fine but can be wrong. What do you know for sure today?

The greatest evidence of birth is not stories from the day you were born, it is that you are alive today! And so it is with the new birth. Birth brings life.

John, who recorded Jesus' words, *"Ye must be born again,"* wrote a letter that provides spiritual proofs of our new life in Christ. Spend some time in the little book of 1 John and examine your own heart. Identify the spiritual "vital signs" — the breath, the heart, the love, the hunger, and thirst! These are signs of life.

Take note of these 23 "birthmarks" for a true believer from 1 John. Use this list personally and share it with others. There is a certainty to Bible salvation. You can know!

1. Believers are depending on Jesus Christ alone (1:1-4, 5:1).
2. Believers desire light, not darkness (1:5-7).
3. Believers acknowledge the truth about self and sin (1:8-10).
4. Believers walk in obedience (2:1-4).
5. Believers have experienced the love of God (2:5-6).
6. Believers begin to love both their enemy and their brother (2:7-11).
7. Believers have God's assurance in writing (2:12-14).
8. Believers show evidence of spiritual growth and victories (2:12-14).
9. Believers love the Lord instead of this world (2:15-17).
10. Believers give unfailing allegiance to Christ (2:18-25).
11. Believers have the Holy Spirit as their Teacher (2:20, 26-27).
12. Believers want to be right with God and ready to meet Him (2:28-29).
13. Believers possess divine power to conquer sin and defeat Satan (3:1-10).

14. Believers bear the mark of God's love and the fruit of the Spirit (3:10-20).
15. Believers develop growing confidence as they obey God (3:21-23).
16. Believers have the witness of the Spirit within (3:24-4:6).
17. Believers know the love of God and respond by loving God and others (4:7-12).
18. Believers witness to others because of the Spirit in them (4:13-15).
19. Believers maintain a constantly maturing love (4:16-21).
20. Believers demonstrate a victorious faith and loving obedience (5:1-6).
21. Believers have both knowledge and experience of the truth (5:7-13).
22. Believers receive answers to prayer (5:14-17).
23. Believers are kept by God and keep themselves for God (5:18-21).

On top of all that, you have a birth certificate! 1 John 5:13 declares, "*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*" The Great Physician put it in writing so that you would have a sure record.

Remember that there is a difference between the *security* of our salvation and the assurance of our salvation. The security of our salvation is wrapped up entirely in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But many people who are saved lack the assurance because they are not walking in obedience to God. Growth in grace and the knowledge of the Lord is the surest evidence that you are one of God's children. Read 2 Peter 1:3-11 and concentrate on your present walk with Christ.

You can know that you have been born again and have eternal life. The Lord desires it and provides it. Look to Him and not yourself. Remember that the Devil brings question marks — God brings periods and exclamation points.

STEP 1 on this journey is to know Christ for yourself, and to have Bible assurance of your own salvation.



Want to share this list with a family member or friend?

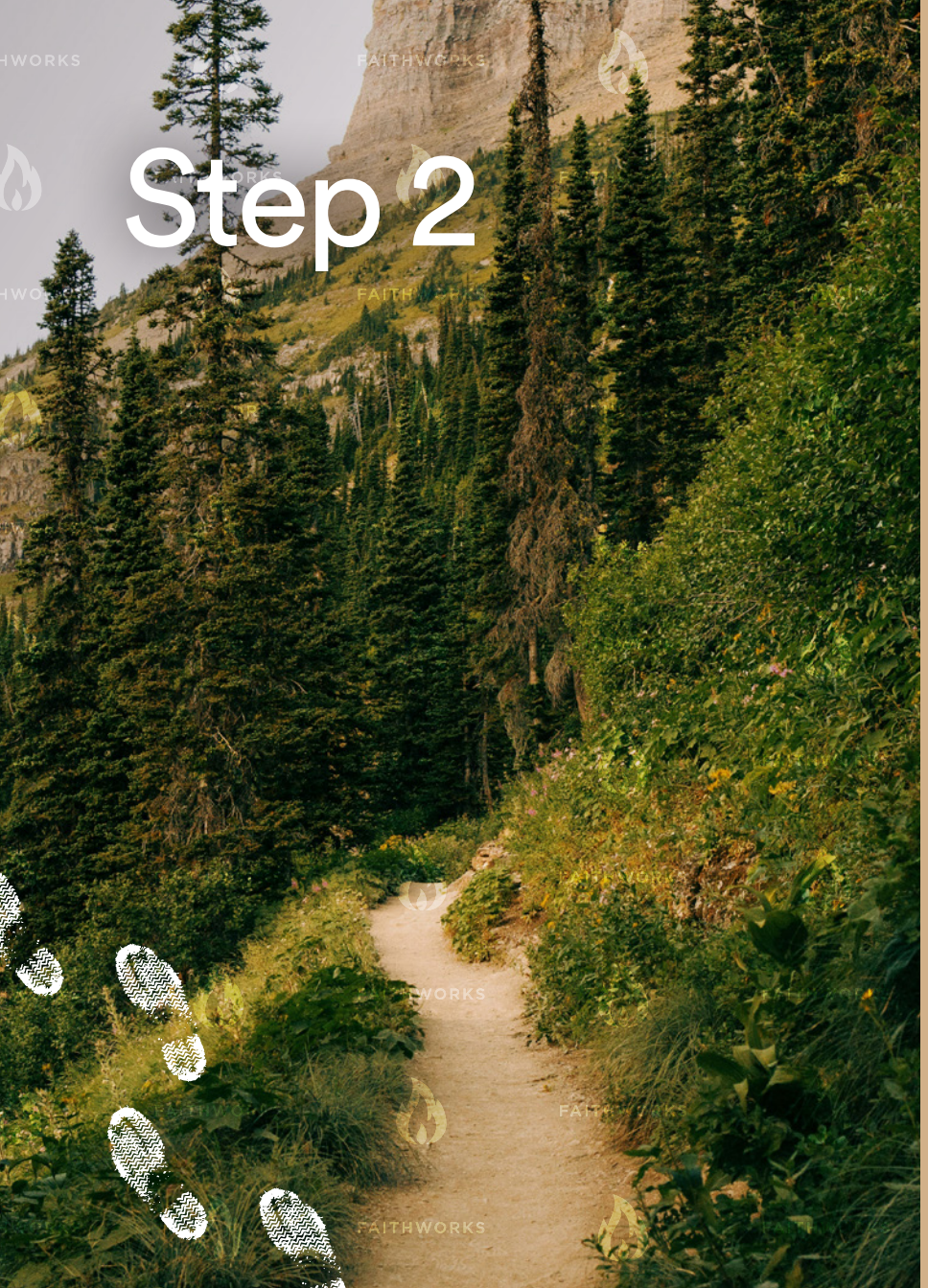
Scan below to download this gospel tool!

Stop & Apply

Write a brief description of how you came to know Christ as your Savior and what He means to you.

Stop & Apply

Write out one Bible verse that you will take as your “assurance verse.”



Obey the Lord in Believer's Baptism

Step 2

Obey the Lord in Believer's Baptism

When Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind. For three days he sat in darkness and prayed. If you were totally blind, you would be praying too! I believe his prayer was simply a continuation of his initial prayer. It was the prayer of his life. Make this the eight word prayer of your life, *"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* And if you keep asking, God will continue answering.

In Acts 9:18, we discover the second step on his journey with Jesus. *"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose,* ***and was baptized."***

The first step is to come to know Christ for yourself — to enter a personal relationship with Jesus as your Savior. The second step is to follow Christ in believer's baptism, in obedience to His command.

The Order is Important

Why is this important? Some people have been baptized as children and they think, "Well, I have been there. I have done that before." But the order is important. First, you believe on Christ, then you identify with Him in baptism. Baptism comes after the gospel is received and believed (Matthew 28:18-20).

In the Book of Acts, there was a man, a eunuch from Ethiopia, to whom Philip ministered. The eunuch wanted to be baptized. In Acts 8:36-37, we read, *"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

There is a divine order here. Do not get them out of sequence. You could get baptized a thousand times and still be a lost person. Because you can go into the water a dry sinner and come out a wet sinner, but you are still a sinner. The problem is not an unwashed body, it is that your heart has not been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. That is why the order is important. First you believe, then you are baptized.

I was baptized as a five-year old boy. I chose to be baptized to show that I had recently trusted Christ as my personal Savior. Now, in fact, I simply chose what Jesus had already chosen for me. Two thousand years ago, He told His disciples that those who believed in Him should be baptized (Mark 16:16).

When I was eighteen years old, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, I went through a great crisis regarding the reality of my relationship with God. Questions about my own faith arose, and, once I settled them, I chose to be baptized again. This was a great struggle for me, but I was baptized again because I wanted to be sure that my baptism was scriptural — following my salvation.

The Method of Baptism

When you get baptized is important, and the *way* you get baptized is important. Some people have been sprinkled, some people have been poured on. In Scripture, those who were baptized went down into the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38). That is what the actual Greek word *baptizo* means - "to dip, immerse, or plunge."

Immersion is the only mode of baptism that fully pictures the gospel — the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When you stand in the water, the water crosses your body, like the cross where Jesus died. When you go into the water, it illustrates the burial of Jesus. When you come out of the water, it pictures the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The ordinance of baptism points to the person and work of Christ on the cross.

It also symbolizes the work of Christ in your life. You were dead in your sins (Ephesians 2:1). You were placed into Christ and you have received eternal life. You are a new person in Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:3). It is literally a picture of the resurrection that brought the new life you now have in the Lord Jesus. When you were saved you were "baptized" by the Holy Spirit into the family of God

(Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5). This is not something you do, but what He does in you.

Paul frequently wrote about the spiritual significance of this baptism.

- To the church at Rome he said, *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized** into Jesus Christ were **baptized** into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:3-4).

- To Christians in Corinth he wrote, *"Buried with him in **baptism**, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead"* (Colossians 2:12).

- To followers of Christ in Galatia he said, *"For as many of you as have been **baptized** into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians 3:27).

This is not the work of water; it is the work of the Spirit in our hearts that places us into Christ. Water baptism is simply the external expression of this inward reality.

My wife and I were married on Friday the 13th. It was the luckiest day of my life, let me tell you! And on that day, she put a ring on my finger and I have never taken it off. My wedding ring identifies me and says, "I am married." My wife is a lovely lady. She is my best friend, and I am very happy to be identified with her. I would not think of taking my ring off and hiding it as if I were ashamed of being married. I am not an "undercover husband." I am open about the fact that I belong to someone, and she belongs to me. The vows we made brought us into a covenant, and the rings are symbols of that covenant. We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8). Baptism is a symbol of the new relationship we have now entered into with God.

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. It publicly identifies you, not as a secret disciple, but a very open disciple of Christ. The Bible says if you believe on Christ, you will not be ashamed of Him (Romans 10:11). He was not ashamed of us when He died on the cross for our sin, and we should not be ashamed to be identified with Him (Matthew 10:32).

Why Did Christ Choose Baptism As the Sign of a Believer?

Christ Himself testified that He was baptized *"to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matthew 3:15). He fulfilled all of the requirements of the Old Testament Law. The Jews were very familiar with ceremonial cleansing and ritual baths. But New Testament baptism had even greater significance. It pointed to the gospel. When Jesus gave His final commission to His followers, He commanded that those who believe on Him should be baptized (Matthew 28:19). Of all the things He could have said to do He chose baptism! But why?

1. ***Baptism is simple.*** Oh, the beautiful simplicity in following Christ! It is not complicated. It does not take long. Baptism happens at a definite moment – a picture of the instantaneous moment when a person believes on Christ and is saved.

2. ***Baptism is a choice.*** No one can be baptized for you. It cannot happen by accident. Followers of Christ must choose to follow Him for themselves.

3. ***Baptism is not something you do on your own.*** It is a church ordinance, administered by a minister of the gospel. I believe that baptism should be done under the authority of a Bible preaching local church (Acts 2:41). It is not something you do; it is done to you. What a picture of salvation! All a true follower can do is submit.

4. ***Baptism is not you speaking – the symbol speaks.*** While the one baptizing is told to baptize *"in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,"* the baptismal candidate is not told to say anything. Our salvation rests on His Word, not ours. Baptism pictures the truth of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:4) - a truth that we have accepted by faith.

5. ***Baptism is obvious.*** There is no mistaking it! You go in dry and come out wet! It is a mark, a clear testimony.

6. ***Baptism is not about who baptizes you but whose name you are baptized in.*** The significance of baptism is not in where you are baptized or who baptizes you. It is not about your Paul or Cephas or Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:12-15). It is all about the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

7. ***Baptism needs only to be done one time.*** Salvation is a once for all gift and baptism pictures that complete gift. Once received, it is never done again. It does not need to be! It was perfect. While the other ordinance of coming to the Lord's Table is to be done regularly (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), baptism is an initial step of obedience that does not need to be repeated again and again.

8. ***Baptism is a matter of obedience.*** Jesus Himself chose it. Jesus Himself commanded it. Those who love Him should have no problem following Him.

Baptism Does Not Save You.

Some people have the idea that baptism saves you. Baptism does not save a man, but it publicly testifies of the salvation he has received. Look at Acts 9:17. Before Saul gets baptized, Ananias calls him, "Brother Saul." Do you know why he called him brother? Because he already had God as his Father. He was already a child of God. This is so powerful. You see, he is already a believer, but when you get to verse 18, he is now willing to be identified with Christ in obedience in baptism.

Baptism Identifies You with Christ and His Church.

Those who follow Christ in baptism testify to their relationship with Christ and their desire to be connected to His people. On the day the Holy Spirit came to live in believers, the Bible says, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42). Baptism identifies you with a local New Testament church and the Bible doctrine preached by that church.

Do Not Delay Your Baptism.

I love the fact that as soon as Paul could get baptized, he did so. Often I meet believers who have never taken the next step of obedience. Perhaps you are struggling with taking this step, or know someone who is. Some people delay it. They say, "I am going to get baptized someday." You are not going to grow as a Christian until you take that next step.

Jesus' command was to go and teach people the gospel, baptize them, and then teach them more truth (Matthew

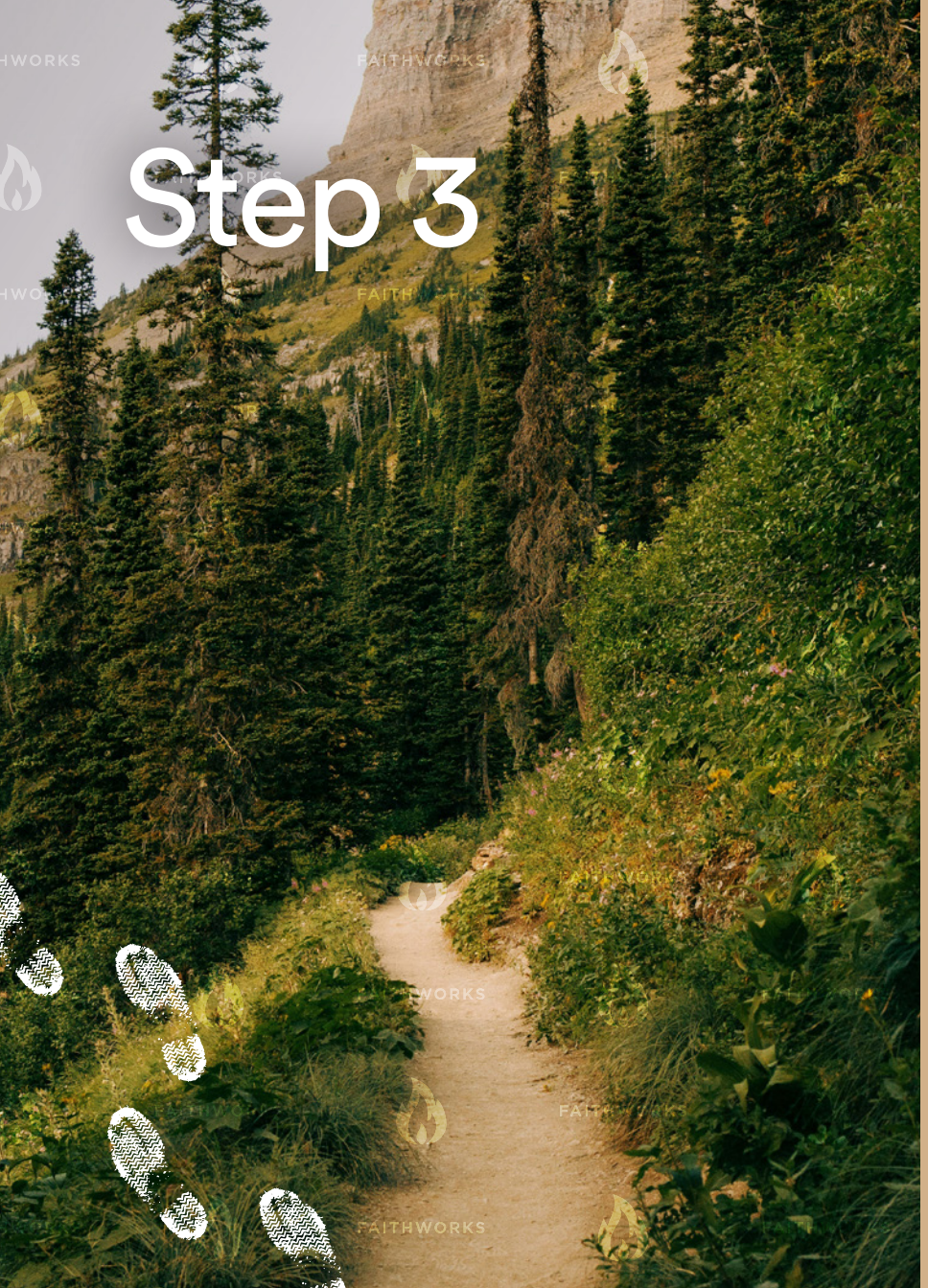
28:18-20). If you want the Lord to continue to teach you, you must be willing to obey what He has already told you to do. Delay is disobedience. Once you believe the gospel, obeying the Lord in baptism is the next step. True faith will produce obedience (James 2:17-18).

If you want to know the next step and grow in your faith, you must take the first step of obedience. Believer's baptism is **STEP 2**.



Stop & Apply

Write down the date and give a brief account of your baptism.



Step 3

Learn to Talk to God and Hear from Him

Step 3

Learn to Talk to God and Hear from Him

To this point, Saul's initial steps in his journey with Jesus have all been recorded in Acts 9. However, the next step is not mentioned in Acts 9, and there is a reason for it. We must compare Scripture with Scripture. We need the whole Bible to help us understand the big picture. In Galatians 1, Saul (now Paul) gives his personal testimony again. He enjoyed doing that frequently. I hope you will readily and gladly share what Jesus is doing in your life.

As you read his story, recorded much later in Galatians 1, you will discover a truth that fits into his first days in Acts 9. Galatians 1:15-18 records,

> *"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days."*

Mark that phrase, *"I went into Arabia."* If you know anything about Arabia, that is the desert. Before he joins with other believers, he journeys into the wilderness. This is very important. What he describes in Galatians 1:17 about going into Arabia fits chronologically into the storyline in Acts 9. Immediately after his baptism, and before he goes up to Jerusalem at the end of the passage, we are given this little biographical insight. **Between Damascus and Jerusalem, Paul had to go to Arabia.**

Why is this important? It was while he was in the desert of Arabia, alone with God, that God began to show him the truth that he would later write down for all of us.

I am glad we have the books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, aren't you? God began opening the truth to him as he communed with God — not with a preacher, but alone in the desert of Arabia. The desert of Arabia was Paul's prayer closet. It was the place where he met with God.

God's Word and Prayer

Once you know Christ as your Savior and have obeyed Him in believer's baptism, the next step is to develop and maintain a daily, personal communication with Him. Married couples enter into a special relationship on their wedding day, but the fellowship between husband and wife must be worked on every day. The day of salvation begins an eternal relationship between the believer and his God, but active fellowship must be maintained every day. Like Paul, we must learn to talk to God and hear from Him.

I believe this step is unspoken in Acts 9 for a reason. These are the hidden days of Paul. Everyone wants to talk about public life. In this social media-crazed world, we are consumed with filters and images. But the real you is not the one that everybody else sees. The real you is the person that only God sees (1 Samuel 16:7). It is the hidden

man, the heart, that matters to God. Jesus said, *"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly"* (Matthew 6:6). The key to open blessing is secret time with God. We must learn both to listen to the Lord and to speak to Him every day.

Listening to the Lord: The Bible

God speaks to mankind through His creation (Psalm 19:1-6), and the circumstances of life. But the primary way that God speaks to us is through His Word (Psalm 19:7-11). Occasionally, someone will say to me, "I would love for God to talk to me." Yet they never read the Bible! George Whitefield said, "God condescended to become an Author, and most people will never even read the book He wrote."

How do you know another person's thoughts? Through their words. If you want to know what God is thinking, read His words. If you want to think like God thinks, keep reading. Only through the Word of God can we develop the mind of Christ. God wrote a Book! Have you read it?

The Word is what helps you think right, feel right, choose right, be right and do right. The Word is to guide our life, but you have to choose to follow every day. How do we

keep our mind fixed on Christ while surrounded by so many distractions? This is the battle we all fight every day!

In the complexities of life, the Word gives us a very simple lesson. Scripture is to your soul what food is to your body. Most of us rarely go a few hours without feeding our bodies...much less a full day! Yet many believers go days without feeding their inner man. There are so many malnourished souls in our world! Busy people trying to function without the sustenance that comes only from God's Word. It is no wonder that many are weak and faltering. We do not have the strength to carry on without the nourishment of Scripture.

The Bible, God's written Word, is the only thing that can satisfy spiritual hunger pangs.

- It is sweeter than honey (Psalm 119:103).
- It is the true bread (Matthew 4:4).
- It is milk (1 Peter 2:2).
- It is meat (Hebrews 5:12-14).

This is not new! In the oldest book in the Bible, Job said, *"I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food"* (Job 23:12). I do not know what Paul ate

while he was in the desert of Arabia, but I do know he was being fed by the Word of God. We must begin our new journey with Jesus by learning to feed on His Word.

God intended for His children to meet Him first in the morning. You can then step out of your quiet place without stepping out of His conscious presence by taking the truth about the Lord with you. Never leave without a verse or spiritual truth that you can pray about and meditate on throughout the day. In this way, you feed on God and His Word wherever you go!

Few of us would consider eating only one meal a week. If you are like me, you eat several times every day! Why would we do more for our bodies than we would for our souls? This is why the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *"Give us day by day our daily bread"* (Luke 11:3).

- ***Daily bread is a recognition of our need.*** We are weak and need strength and sustenance we do not have. A dear friend said to me not long ago, "We all have the idea that at some point we will not have the same struggles. That never happens. We start over every day. Every day we need the Lord."
- ***Daily bread is a realization of God's provision.*** For all of my lack, He is enough! Learning to be content

is a process of realizing that *"...as thy days, so shall thy strength be"* (Deuteronomy 33:25). God will give you strength for each new day as you meet Him in His Word.

- ***Daily bread is a reminder to walk by faith daily.*** Why are we not commanded to pray, "Give us this week our daily bread?" or "Give us this month our daily bread?" God designed life to be lived with daily dependence on Him and daily communion with Him. Walking with God is a daily matter.

- ***Daily bread is the means of remembering the needs of others.*** When we seek *"our daily bread"* we typically think only of ourselves, yet the Lord uses the plural — *"give us this day our daily bread."* As you hear from God you will also have truth to share with others. Many times God will give you grace and truth that someone else needs — someone who God will bring across your path that day! God will feed your spiritual hunger through His Word and then use you to feed another.

"Our daily bread" is a way of life. The children of Israel had to pick up their daily bread fresh every morning while they were in the wilderness (Exodus 16), and so do we. But, what a joy it is! Because this bread is not something; it is Someone.

Christ Himself is the morning manna that sustains our inner man. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said it best:

> "Christian, learn to feed more on Christ: 'Eat, O friends! drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved!' When you are asked to a feast, there is no greater affront you can put upon the entertainer than by being content with a crumb below the table. Yet this is the way the Christians of our day affront the Lord of glory. Oh, how few seem to feed much on Christ! How few seem to put on His white flowing raiment! How few seem to drink deep into His Spirit! Most are content with a glimpse now and then of pardon – a crumb from the table, and a drop of His Spirit. Awake, dear friends! 'These things have I spoken unto you, that your joy may be full'."

Come to His table every morning and you will not be disappointed. He is there. The Spirit of Christ is *"our daily bread"* (Luke 11:11-13). He will fill you and prepare you to feed others.

Feed On The Scriptures

Recently I was reminded again how much I need the Word of God fresh in my soul every day. How stale we can get, starving ourselves of the very life-giving power of God's

Word. But when we feed on the Scriptures, there is such joy and blessing! Jeremiah testified, *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart"* (Jeremiah 15:16).

During His earthly ministry, Christ's schedule was to be *"... daily in the temple teaching"* (Mark 14:49). He has a daily Word — daily bread, fresh manna for us all! The life the Lord designed for His people requires us to come back to Him every day for the bread of life.

There is no "fast food" for the soul. It takes time. Sit down at His table. No one prepares a meal like He does! Feed on the Scriptures. Take time to digest them. Allow them to sink into the deep places of your heart.

There is no "meal substitute" in the Christian life. We need the Word of God. No devotional book or religious reading can take the place of God's truth. There is health and help in that God-breathed book! The Lord declares that man needs daily wisdom: *"Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors"* (Proverbs 8:34). Daily wisdom comes from the daily Word.

There is no new "meal plan" to become strong in the Lord. We must constantly return to the basics. For years

I have heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. I believe that in the nourishment of the soul this is indeed the case. George Mueller wrote, "The first thing I should do every day was to get my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about...was how my inner man might be nourished." Mueller went on to say that as he meditated in the Word of God he found food for his soul and often bread to pass along to others as well. We must learn to begin the day — every day — feeding on God's wonderful Word.

The believers in Berea are an example to us all. Luke said of them, *"they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11). Be ready to receive what God prepared for you today! Search the Scriptures daily — and start today. The Lord has much to say to you through the Bible; be ready to listen.

Communing with Christ: Prayer

God speaks to us through His Word, and we speak to him through prayer. Real communication requires a back and forth. I have close friends — friends that I have had for a long time. They will call me or I will call them, and when

we have a conversation, it is not one-sided. Both of us are communicating and responding to one another.

God is a real person and as surely as He speaks to us, we can talk to Him. The Bible is the only book you will ever read that the author is always with you! The Bible is God's revelation of Himself — a living Book with a living Author. When you open the Bible, you are not opening the Bible just to read a passage for the day. You are opening the Bible to meet God in His Word, to know God in a greater way. Come every day into His presence and give God the opportunity to speak to you. Then respond to Him — talk to Him about what He is talking to you about.

Saul started praying on the road to Damascus, but he did not stop praying there. His whole life became a life of prayer. When we call on the Lord for salvation, that is simply the beginning of our contact with God. Learn to pray, and live in the spirit of prayer at every step on your journey.

It should be as natural for a Christian to talk to God as it is for him to talk to anyone. And it ought to be more frequent. You can talk to Him anytime, anywhere, about anything. Prayer is our direct line to Heaven.

Saul is going to be helped by a wide variety of preachers and teachers. God will use Ananias, Barnabas, Peter and many others to guide this new believer in the early days. But the most wonderful truth he will learn will come through his own private time with God in the desert of Arabia. Like Paul, you need to hear the teaching of God's Word from others, but you must have time to hear from God yourself.

Most people think of a desert as a dry, barren, lonely place. But we read in the Bible that God did some really amazing things in the desert, and God grows beautiful fruit even in the hard places of life.

Quiet Times with God

Life is busy, and our world is a noisy place. Sometimes the noise is internal and we have to deal with our own distractions. It is vital that we maintain daily quiet times with God if we are going to effectively hear from Him and speak to Him. Arabia represents that place where we get **alone** with God, **away** from others, and **attentive** to the Lord. I hope you will learn the discipline and joy of doing this every day.

Where is your Arabia? Is there a bench where you like to sit? Is there a place you like to walk or drive? Is there some

place where you can go and talk with God? You need a place like that, and you need a time every day where you meet God, and God shows you things from Scripture.

When I get up in the morning, the first thing I have to do is open my copy of the Bible and say, "Lord, would you speak to me?" I need a word from God every day. I need something for my own soul. You never outgrow that. People graduate from kindergarten, elementary school, high school, college and grad school. But you never graduate from growing in grace. You never graduate from growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. That is a lifelong pursuit. Follow Paul. Pursue Christ. It is one of the first steps that believers must take, and it is a step that must be taken every day.

You ought to have a copy of the Scripture that is yours, a Bible that you enjoy reading from. You may get a devotional book to assist you. I have tools that I use regularly, and they are helpful and good. *Enjoying the Journey* has developed devotional resources and devotional plans that might be of help to you, including a daily 10-minute devotional Bible study podcast. (Visit www.etj.bible for additional help.)

A Devotional Life

Devotional time is not limited to a few minutes; we enter the presence of God so that we may live in His presence throughout the day. The great goal of prayer and meditation in the Word of God is to know Him in a greater way, and to walk consciously in His presence. Do not just pray: have a prayer life. When you invite God into the conversation, you will find yourself brought consciously into His presence. Let every day be a prayer day by bringing everyday responsibilities to God.

While there is no place to stop in our pursuit of God, there is a place to start. Begin right where you are. Allow the normal routines and relationships of life to be turned into prayer prompters and you will soon discover what is meant by the admonition to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Take these simple prayer pointers and incorporate them today:

1. ***Pray as you study.*** The Bible is the greatest prayer book in the world. Our prayers are often shallow and surface-level, until we begin to talk to God about what He wants to discuss. Take your daily Bible passage

and turn it into a conversation with God. Ask Him questions. Allow the Scripture to guide your prayers. Confess sin as it is revealed. Claim the promises you discover. Apply the truth you uncover. Intercede for others. In this way, the Word of God leads us to the God of the Word.

2. ***Pray as you see.*** Imagine how many people you see every day! When we cross paths with others, we inevitably have thoughts, experience emotions, and form opinions. Turn your impressions into intercessions. Our thoughts about others are not always right, but when we pray, God works in them and in us. Lustful, proud, unkind, prejudicial, and angry thoughts must be brought into the holy presence of Christ. As you pray for others, you will find that God begins to give you His mind for that person, and you will begin to see them differently. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see through His eyes every day. Prayer will not only change others, it will change you.

3. ***Pray as you scroll.*** Turn your social media feed into a prayer list! Too much time is wasted mindlessly scrolling through posts. It is usually best to turn off notifications so that you control when you check social media. Then, make that time intentional. Social media is very dangerous when it is used only for entertainment value. Use it — do not let it use you. Romans 12:15 says, *"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."* Whether it is a positive or a negative update, you can pray for all.

4. ***Pray as you speak.*** Days are filled with a variety of interactions. Some are personal, others are professional, and many are seemingly incidental. But, if you believe in divine appointments and trust the providence of God, you will begin to recognize that God brings people across your path for a purpose. When you talk with someone on the phone, breathe a prayer to God for them. As you meet people who are hurting, stop and have a prayer with them. Even as you write a text, a letter, or an email - you can pray for that individual. All ground becomes holy ground as you begin to talk to the Lord.

Paul's New Testament letters are filled with prayers for others and requests for prayer for himself. He understood the necessity and power of communing with God, and lived in a spirit of prayer. On this journey of faith, we move forward on our knees!

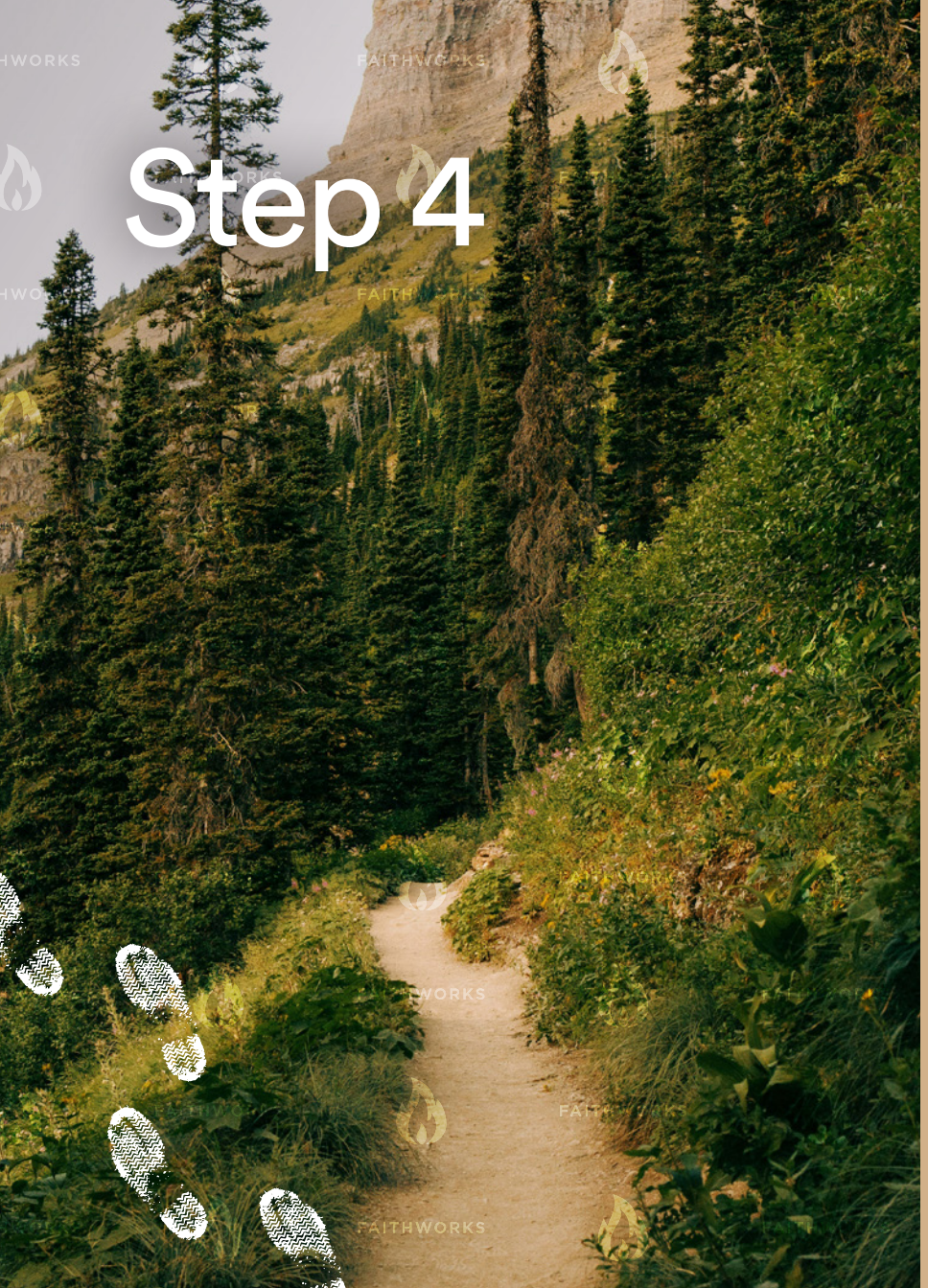
The ultimate goal is to develop a daily walk with God and draw near to Him — to talk to God and hear from Him. As you do, the Lord will give you strength and direction for the journey ahead. Talking to God and hearing from Him is **STEP 3.**

(Use the *My First 30 Days in God's Word* on page 122 to help you begin your time in the Bible.)



Stop & Apply

Write down 5 things God is teaching you in your current Bible reading. Speak to the Lord about the things He is teaching you.



Enter into Fellowship with the Local Church

Step 4

Enter into Fellowship with the Local Church

We have learned the importance of daily fellowship with Christ. Now we must give attention to fellowship with other followers of Christ. The primary means of this is the fellowship of a local church. We were made for fellowship, not only for social reasons but for spiritual ones.

There is a great deal of emphasis in our world today about "community." People talk about "finding their tribe" and

their need for connection. Jesus knew and understood that perfectly. He made us as relational beings, and He provided for that in His church. The church is the body of Christ. We are connected to Christ who is the Head, and we are connected to one another as different members of that body. Paul wrote much about this truth (Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 5:23-30). But before he ever explained it to others, he experienced it himself.

"With the Disciples"

After being baptized, Acts 9:19 says, *"And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days **with** the disciples which were at Damascus."* Mark in your Bible the phrase, "***with** the disciples which were at Damascus."* The little word 'with' is important. We are with Jesus. We are with one another. The 'with'ness, the fellowship, is essential.

The world can give you friendship, but only the Lord can give you fellowship. You can have friends and not be a Christian. You can have friends who are not Christians. But real fellowship, oneness, unity — that comes from having Christ in common. The word *disciples* means 'learners.' We are all learning, and we are all taking the next step.

Acts 9:23 says, *"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him."* Just because you follow Jesus does not mean everybody will cheer you on. When you start truly following Christ, those who are opposed to Christ will push back. **Forward motion produces friction.**

Do not imagine that the Devil will leave you alone if you seek to please God. Everything God ordains, Satan opposes. That is why you need the fellowship of God's people even more.

Connect with a Church that Teaches the Bible

Look at Acts 9:24-26:

*"But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to **join** himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple."*

This new believer was connected to the disciples in Damascus when he was at Damascus. And when he left Damascus and went to Jerusalem, what did he do? He joined himself to the disciples at Jerusalem.

Perhaps you have wondered, "What does the Bible say about church membership?" The way churches keep up with members and transfer members has changed through the centuries. But the *principle* of membership has not. Mark the word *"join"* in verse 26. It is a word of belonging. If you are a believer, you should belong to a group of believers.

Paul sought to *"**join** himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple."* Before you get critical of them, imagine that a known terrorist tried to join your church! This is a man who had just been arresting people like you, throwing them in prison, and he comes and presents himself for church membership. Understandably, they were a little skeptical.

One important observation: from the very beginning *only true believers* were allowed to join the church. Joining a church does not make you a Christian. It is possible to have your name on a church roll but not in the Lamb's Book of Life in Heaven (Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 20:15, 21:27). God's record is the one that matters most! Nevertheless, those who belong to Christ should seek to join their life and influence with other like-minded believers.

Now notice verses 27 and 28. I love this. *"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And* ***he was with them*** *coming in and going out at Jerusalem."*

Notice that little word again: *"with." "He was with them"* in Damascus (verse 19). Now he is *"with them"* at Jerusalem. He was connected to a church in Damascus. He was connected to the church in Jerusalem, and before the book is over, he will move to a city called Antioch, and he will connect himself to the disciples there. Wherever God led him, he joined himself to a local New Testament church.

There is no substitute for belonging to a local assembly of believers. In our world of technological advancement, some suggest that you can get what you need spiritually through online connections. But if face-to-face interactions were indispensable for Saul, surely we all need them. If it was important in his day, how much more important is it in the day we live to be connected to a local church?

A local church is a visible expression of the family of God — and everyone needs family. Saul found three important relationships in the local church, and so will you.

Ananias - A Spiritual Father

First, God gave Saul Ananias. You will recall that Ananias was the man early in Acts 9 that God sent to Saul, to pray for him so he could have his eyes opened and be baptized. **Ananias was a spiritual father to this newborn Christian.**

One of the blessings God gives you when He connects you to other Christians is the guidance of spiritual fathers. There is only one Heavenly Father, but you may have many spiritual fathers who teach you, mentor you, encourage you, and get you started on the right path. The Lord will use pastors, teachers, and seasoned believers throughout your spiritual journey to keep you moving in the right direction. Thank God for each one of them.

I have had several of those spiritual fathers. God brought people into my life who were more mature Christians. I needed them. You need them. Someday, you will be that for somebody else. But right now you need mature believers like Ananias in your life. You need people who tell you the truth. You need mature Christians who will tell

you not what you want to hear, but what you need to hear. And that is exactly what Ananias did. So God gave him an Ananias. Who has God brought into your life to serve as a spiritual father?

Barnabas - A Spiritual Brother

Next, God gave Saul Barnabas. Barnabas means "son of consolation." He was an encourager. If you look at Acts 11, Barnabas is the one who sends for Saul and helps him get started serving the Lord.

Barnabas was a friend, a fellow Christian, a brother in the church who introduced him to the church, influenced him, instructed him, and helped him get involved.

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). A good test of a true friend is this: Do they dull my spiritual senses or help to sharpen them? You may have many friends, and all of your friends may not be Christians. We are to be a friend to sinners to seek to bring them to Jesus. But your closest friends ought to be those who want you to become more like Jesus. You are now, or you soon will be, what your friends are.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20).

Build your most intimate friendships and fellowship in the context of the church, with fellow believers. Seek spiritual friendships and pay attention to those God providentially brings into your life.

Congregation - A Spiritual Family

Finally, through the local church, God not only gave Saul Ananias and Barnabas, He gave him a whole congregation of fellow believers. In Acts 9:28 he is with *"them."* That is plural — many people. We do not know all of their names, but they were fellow Christians. He needed them, and they needed him.

Family was God's idea. He started it. Psalm 68:6 declares, *"God setteth the solitary in families."* Maybe you have the most amazing family in the history of the world. Thank God for that. Then you are doubly blessed. Perhaps you come from a divided or dysfunctional family. Many people have the wrong view of the Heavenly Father because of an abusive or absentee earthly father.

This is what is so amazing about belonging to Christ. It does not matter biologically who your family is. If you are a Christian, you become a part of the most wonderful family in the world, and that is the family of God! God's complete family has not met together yet (Ephesians 3:14-15), but

there is a family reunion being planned in Heaven. We will all go to the Father's house one day, according to John 14. Until then, it is imperative that you connect yourself to a local representation of that family in a local church. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and the Father's children need one another.

A church home is not optional for those who want to become what God saved them to become — it is essential. Not only do you need a church, but your church needs you. Church membership is not just about what you *get*, it is about what God can use you to *give*. As we move forward on our journey, we also help others to move forward on their journey (3 John 5-8).

Why Go to Church?

In our day the church is being minimized and marginalized by society. Satan and his minions are on the attack. Many Christians have taken a passive, take-it-or-leave-it approach. This is not the time for believers to take a step back from church! We live on the edge of eternity and now is the time for every church member to find their place and do their part to advance the cause of Christ. Soon we will see the Founder of the church, Jesus Christ, and give an account of what He gave us to do.

The word *church* means "a called-out assembly." While the purpose of the church does not end with the assembly, it does start there. Some people so emphasize that the church must work outside the walls that they neglect the gathering with God's people. However, it is in the meeting of the New Testament church that the ministry is set in motion. It is as we come together that we are edified. As we grow, we begin to function in this world.

8 Bible Reasons Believers Assemble

1. The Church Assembles to Pray.

Most people assume the primary reason that we gather is to hear the preaching of God's Word. I love preaching! But we begin with prayer, because God began there. After the ascension of Christ, the first meeting of the church was a prayer meeting. In Acts 1:13-14, we read these words:

> *"And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication,*

with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

The first gathering of the New Testament assembly was not an evangelistic crusade, a revival meeting or even a Bible study — it was a prayer meeting. Why? Because prayer sets everything else in motion. When we meet together, we should come together to pray with and for one another. This is something every believer can do. Men, women, and children can pray. Shy or outgoing, healthy or strong, young or old — all of us can pray. Begin there.

2. The Church Assembles to Hear the Word Of God.

Scripture commands us to, *"Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine..."* (1 Timothy 4:13). What is your attitude towards the preaching and teaching of the Word of God? Begin now to develop an appetite for sound preaching.

Christians in the New Testament church did not have their own copies of the Scriptures when they came together. Furthermore, the revelation of Scripture was not complete. Yet, there was expectancy when the Bible was read. They heard these inspired writings expounded. Is that same hunger and thirst in us? When we come together to hear the Word of God, it should excite us.

3. The Church Assembles to Sing.

Colossians 3:16 instructs us to speak to and encourage one another *"in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."* The Bible says, *"speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual psalms"* (Ephesians 5:19). We speak to ourselves when we sing. We speak to God when we sing. However, we also speak to one another as we sing. We should sing from our hearts to the Lord. Worship is not a group sport; it is the individual heart attitude toward God. When our hearts are fixed on God, it will point others to Him. Corporate worship is simply the assembling of many people sincerely engaged in personal worship.

4. The Church Assembles to Give.

Christians are called on to give out of a heart of gratitude to God through the local church. 1 Corinthians 16:2 commands, *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."* On the Lord's Day, we pay our tithe (first ten percent) and give our offerings. Be a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

5. The Church Assembles to Exhort One Another.

The early church was all about edifying, building up one another. It is not about me; it is about us. It is not about what I can gain, but what I can give. And here is the beautiful secret: as you give and minister, and exhort, guess what the Lord does in you? He does the same building up in your heart and life. Everyone is having a hard time — encourage them!

When we exhort one another, the preacher is not the one who does all the talking. He might give the sermon, or the teacher might give the lesson, but Hebrews 10:25 says that it is important that we are, *"exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* Sometimes you may go to church, and the sermon may not be the most dynamic sermon you have ever heard in your life. But understand that even on those days, an encouraging word to a friend or from a friend may be the means by which God encourages your faith.

Yes, you need the preaching and teaching of the word, but you also need the conversations, edifying, and encouragement that comes when the church family meets.

6. The Church Assembles to Observe the Ordinances.

God left us two ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-33). Jesus commanded His disciples, "*This do in remembrance of me*" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

Only a visible, local church can physically baptize. You also must have a local assembly to administer the Lord's Supper. These are church ordinances. They do not belong to me as an individual. They belong to the local assembly and we have the privilege to participate.

7. The Church Assembles for Fellowship.

At the end of Acts 2, we find a beautiful snapshot of the early New Testament church. Observe Acts 2:42, "*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*" It is good for God's people to have a good time with one another and enjoy being together. Isn't it a great thing that you can spend time with God's people the right way and not regret it the next morning? That kind of fellowship makes you stronger, not weaker — better, not worse.

8. The Church Assembles to Be Equipped to Witness and Work.

Acts 2:43-47 provides a report on the ministry of the Word. Those assemblies of believers set in motion a chain reaction outside the assembly of the church (Ephesians 4:11-12). We carry our faith outside the church walls. But it begins by meeting together. From the overflow of what God does among His people, we minister to a lost world around us. Perhaps we are accomplishing so little in this world because the assembly of New Testament churches is crowded out by so many lesser things.

We Are Not To Forsake The Assembling Of Ourselves Together.

Hebrews 10:25 commands, *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

The Lord Jesus said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). There is something precious to Christ about His followers assembling. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He often took His disciples aside, by themselves, so He could teach them.

Christ still wants to instruct His followers. Notice what the Bible warns: *"...as the manner of some is..."* That describes the world we are living in. At the end of the age, when assembling ought to mean more, it seems it means less and less to many of God's children.

On the average Lord's Day morning, you can drive through the community and see people doing almost everything except going to meet with God's people. That is not the Lord's way.

We Must Exhort One Another.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another." This great key helps unlock the purpose for God's people to assemble. In fact, the previous verse says, *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."* In our world, many people look at church selfishly. *What can I get out of it? Are my children going to have a good time? How will this benefit us?*

We ought to turn the thing around. It should not only be about "what I can get out of the church meeting?" but "what

can I contribute?" "How can I be a blessing?" 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that all of the members are connected to the body. All of the members are under the Head of the body, which is the Lord Jesus, but they all contribute to one another.

The Founder Is Returning.

All of us are participants. None are dispensable. Find your place in your local assembly. What can you do to make that church all God wants it to be? How can you play your part in that called-out assembly? Pray that your church will move forward to the glory of God.

Notice the powerful ending of Hebrews 10:25: *"and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."* What day is the author referring to? It is the day of the Lord's return. Jesus is coming back. The Founder is about to return. The Head of the church is going to show up. How ashamed we will be for Him to find us totally disconnected from the other members when He arrives. Christ loves the church. Christ bought the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). I want Him to find me in my place, doing exactly what God wants me to do.

Determine to Be Faithful.

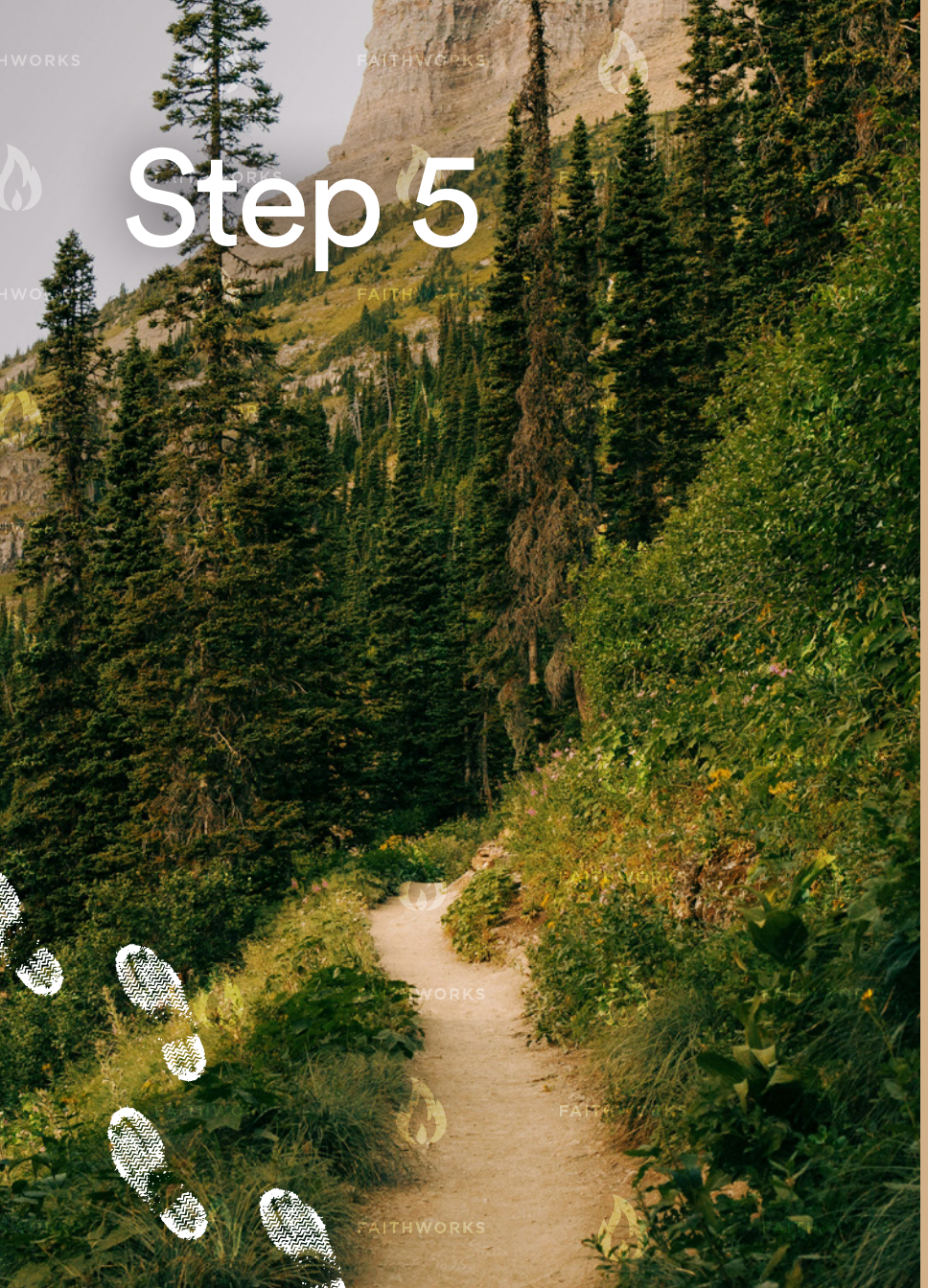
You cannot be a blessing and help to the whole local church unless you are there. Belong. Be there. When the church meets together, let it mean something to you to be with God's people. If the church was so important that Christ died for it, don't you think our lives ought to stay connected to it?

Paul loved the local church and was constantly seeking to help God's people. Make up your mind, by the grace of God, that you will be the very best church member you can possibly be. As you take these steps faithfully, you will advance in your own faith and help others along the way. Entering into fellowship with a local church is **STEP 4.**



Stop & Apply

Begin a prayer list for your pastor and members of your church.



Step 5

Witness for Christ

Step 5

Witness for Christ

Those who know Christ have the privilege and responsibility of making Him known to others. A witness is one who has seen something, experienced something, knows something, and can share it with others. Jesus said, *"And ye are **witnesses** of these things"* (Luke 24:48). Again He said, *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be **witnesses** unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

You *are* a witness. What kind of witness are you?

The word "gospel" means good news, and good news should not be kept to yourself! Good news must be shared. There are two definite things that Christians have to share: the truth of Jesus, and the testimony of how Jesus has changed our life. Paul loved to talk about the doctrine of Christ and the difference that Christ had made in him.

You have the truth of the gospel — the power of Christ, and your testimony — the power of a changed life. Many people who will never go to a church building to hear a sermon will listen to a joyful Christian share their story of God's love. It is hard to argue with a changed life!

As you begin to take this step — sharing your testimony and sharing your Christ — your own faith grows stronger. And the more you share it, the more others will be introduced to the faith and brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Witness Immediately.

Immediately after Saul's baptism, Acts 9:20-22 records:

*"And **straightway** he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were*

amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ."

Straightway is a word we do not use much today, but it simply means *immediately*.

Obedience is always present tense and there is something thrilling about a new Christian's immediate desire to tell others of Christ. No doubt those who heard him were in awe. They were thinking, "This is the guy that was just arresting Christians, and now he is telling us that Jesus is the Son of God!" But when Jesus makes a difference in a person's life, it comes out in the way they speak. Your mouth tells on you! *"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."* (Matthew 12:34). If you really are a follower of Christ, share it. Do not be ashamed to be identified with Jesus Christ.

It was not when Paul became a preacher that he started witnessing. It was as a new believer. It was not after he studied with Peter at Jerusalem. No, it was immediately. It

commenced with his baptism, identifying with Christ, but then it continued wherever he was — every day — sharing his faith.

Start Where You Are

Start at your school. Start at your job. Wherever God has placed you, start there! People everywhere are searching for answers. You are going to walk by people today and every day who are confused and looking for light and truth.

A girl walked up to me at the end of a meeting in California, and she said, "God did something in my heart tonight." I said, "I am glad." She said, "You do not know me, and you do not know this, but I was contemplating taking my own life. Tonight, God has done something in my heart, and I realized I have a reason to live."

Searching souls are all around us. Those who know have to tell those who do not know. Begin now and begin right where you are.

Witness Boldly.

Scripture does not just say that Saul witnessed, it describes how he did it. Acts 9:27 says, *"But Barnabas took him, and*

brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached ***boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."***

He preached boldly, unashamedly. Verse 29 repeats it: *"And* ***he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus****, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him."*

Give your gospel witness daily and courageously. When you have the opportunity, refuse to be intimidated. You do not have to cower in a corner. If people can parade their sin through the streets, you can speak a word for Jesus and be unashamed of Him.

I teach from the Bible, and so I often carry the Bible with me through public places. I can become conscious of the fact that I am walking through that place with a Bible, and there are some people who may like that and there are some people that may think, "What is that?"

Let us be honest. There is a tendency in all of us to get a little sheepish about this. We may get nervous about what somebody might think. Who cares? The reality is you have

what everybody is looking for — and it is not a *what*, it is a *who*. His name is Jesus, and the sooner in your journey you can begin to share your faith, the better off you are going to be.

> *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed"* (Romans 10:9-11).

We confess to Christ first, then we profess Him to other people.

This is the natural next step, the logical progression, from talking to God, to talking to others about God. And this is something all of us can do. Some believers will become preachers and missionaries, but every Christian can be a personal witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Witness Consistently.

Witnessing about Christ was not something that Saul did for a time. This became the pattern of his life. We must

keep taking the next step with and for the Lord.

In words and example, this one man pointed untold multitudes to Jesus and made a lasting impact for eternity. When we allow the Lord to make the difference in our lives that He wants to make, He will use us to make a difference in the world.

One of the most greatly used preachers in history was a man named D.L. Moody. Early on, Moody made a covenant with God that he would witness to one person every day. One night, after ten o'clock, he realized that he had failed that day to speak a word for the Lord. He dressed and went out into the streets of Chicago. The man he spoke to that night was not at all interested. In fact, he was angry that Moody had spoken to him about his soul. Three months later that man awakened Moody in the middle of the night to tell him he wanted to be saved!

Ask God to give you one person every day with whom you can speak about Christ. Live looking for opportunities this week to share your personal testimony of faith in the Lord Jesus. Carry gospel literature with you every day and seek to witness to at least one individual. Like Saul, your consistent testimony can be the means of pointing many others to Christ.

A New Name and a New Nature

Acts 13:9 marks the time when Saul of Tarsus begins to be known as Paul the Apostle. It is likely that this man had both a Jewish name (Saul) and a Roman one (Paul). But there seems to be great significance in the fact that over time he became distinguished differently. Indeed his identity had changed — Christ was his whole *"life"* (Colossians 3:4).

When God changed a man's name in Scripture, it was because He was changing his nature. In the Old Testament, Abram (high father) became known as Abraham (father of many nations). Jacob (deceiver) became known as Israel (prince with God). In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter (rock) to reveal His special purpose in his life. Their identities were brought in line with God's intent for them.

While there is no mention of God telling Saul to begin using the name Paul, from the start of his work to carry the gospel in Acts 13, he is never identified as Saul again.

- Saul was known as a Pharisee. Paul was known as a preacher.

- Saul was consumed with the Jewish religion. Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles, with a heart for the whole world.
- Saul was known for his great education and ability. Paul, whose name means "little," was known for the greatness of Christ in his life.

Everything changed as this man began to journey with Jesus.

This is not just Paul's journey; it is to be ours! "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Begin now to establish a testimony as a true follower of Jesus Christ. As you live consistently for Him, you will have increased opportunities to speak for Him.

In Acts 22, Paul stands before a massive crowd of people and is persecuted for his faith in Christ. In Acts 22:1, he says, "*Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.*" Take the time to read his Christian witness from verse one to twenty-one. In his "defence", he goes on the offense for Christ!

He begins in verse 3, "*I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus…*" He goes all the way back to his life before he met Christ to give them his life story. But it is not just his story, it is the story of Jesus in his life. What a story of grace it is!

As Paul rehearses all of the steps he has taken, he is saying, "I have been down this path. Can I just tell you about my journey with Jesus? And you can make the journey too."

Witness Cheerfully.

A few chapters later, Paul stands before King Agrippa. In Acts 26:1, the Bible says, "*Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.*" I have marked that phrase in my Bible, because that is the only person you can speak for! No one else can speak for you and you cannot speak for them. Speak for yourself. "*Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:*"

He begins his witness in verse 2 with these words: "*I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day…*" I love the fact that when he began speaking for Jesus, he was happy to do so.

Are you happy to be a Christian? Are you happy that you are going to Heaven? If your answer is yes, then ask

yourself this: Am I happy to speak for Jesus today? Am I happy to share my faith? Be a happy witness of Christ. There is nothing more attractive about the gospel than a person who is filled with the joy of Jesus. Let others see your life and say, "I do not know what you have, but I want it." It is a beautiful thing.

Read through Acts 26, and you will find that Paul does this same thing. He gladly shares his testimony. He speaks in his own words and from his heart about the difference Jesus Christ has made in his life. That is powerful.

The Apostle Paul was a well-educated man. He spoke multiple languages. He sat at the feet of one of the most esteemed teachers, a man named Gamaliel. Did you know historians estimate that the Apostle Paul had the equivalent of three PhDs by today's educational standards? Three PhDs! And yet, every time he is given the opportunity to speak, he does not try to wow the audience with his learning. He humbly says, "Can I tell you what happened to me on the road to Damascus one day?"

There is nothing better to share than Jesus Christ and the difference He has made in your life. Do not ever get away from that.

Charles Hadden Spurgeon was perhaps the most famous minister who ever lived. He is called "the Prince of Preachers". He was a pastor in London, England, in the 1800's, but he is still the most read pastor in history. His printed sermons are larger than the Encyclopedia Britannica. That is a lot of preaching! He was a diligent student of Scripture with much to say.

But did you know in the recorded sermons of Charles Spurgeon, 300 times he gave his salvation testimony? In hundreds of printed sermons, we read how, as a boy, he came into a little Methodist church on a winter Sunday morning and heard a lay preacher speak from Isaiah 45:22, *"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."* And that lay preacher caught his eye and said, "Young man, you look miserable and you always will be miserable. Miserable in life and miserable in death. Look to Jesus and be saved." And Charles Spurgeon said, "That day, I got a glimpse of Jesus. I looked, I could have looked my eyes away."

That was the day Charles Spurgeon met Jesus Christ. And for the rest of his life and ministry, every time he could, he wanted to tell how Jesus saved him. Be sure you are saved, and never get far away from that. Remember what Christ did for you and repeat it often.

Permit me to give a brief footnote to Saul's story, to Paul's ministry, and to your life and testimony. Others will come to faith in Christ as you take your next steps. Not everyone is going to like it. Some people will be spectators and some people will be instigators. But some will choose to journey with Jesus too, and you will find fellow travelers along the way. As you follow Jesus, you will lead others to Him.

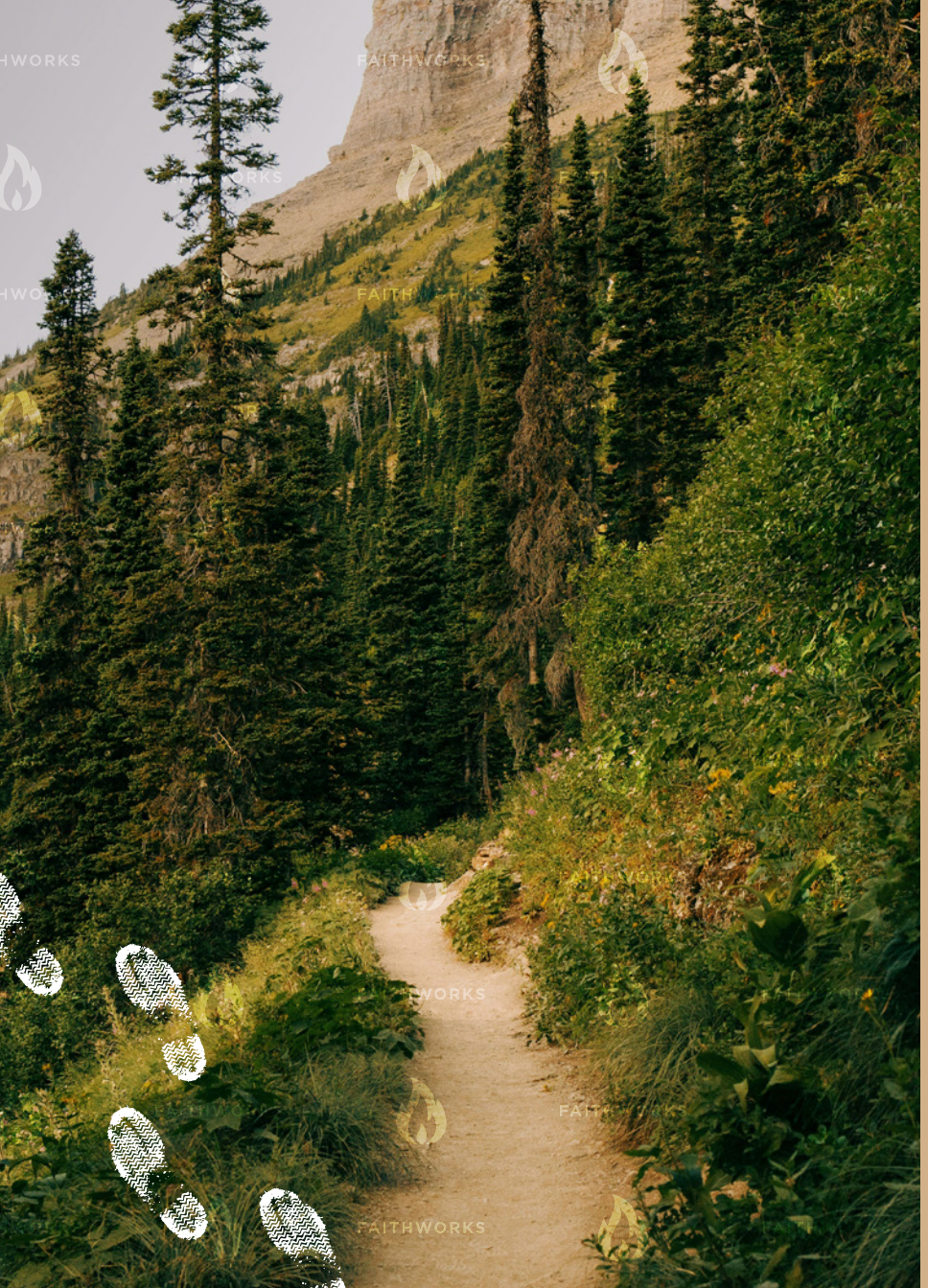
We are almost 2000 years removed from the Apostle Paul following Jesus, taking his first steps, and we are still talking about it. And we are not only talking about him, we are learning from him. And we are not only learning from him, we are taking the same steps.

I can hear the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* He really is a pattern for all who come after him. Follow him as he followed Jesus. Witnessing for Christ is **STEP 5.**



Stop & Apply

Make a list of individuals who you will pray for and speak to about Jesus Christ.



Where Will the Journey End?

Where Will the Journey End?

The journey of faith does not end until we go to be with God. It truly is the journey of a lifetime. Paul walked the pathway of faith for more than thirty years after he came to know Jesus personally. His goal was, *"that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24). And the Lord helped him to do so. Not long before he left this world he wrote, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

You can finish your course with joy! Our final destination of Heaven is ahead, and there are many blessings between here and there. The same God who helped Paul to continue pursuing Christ will help you. Keep following.

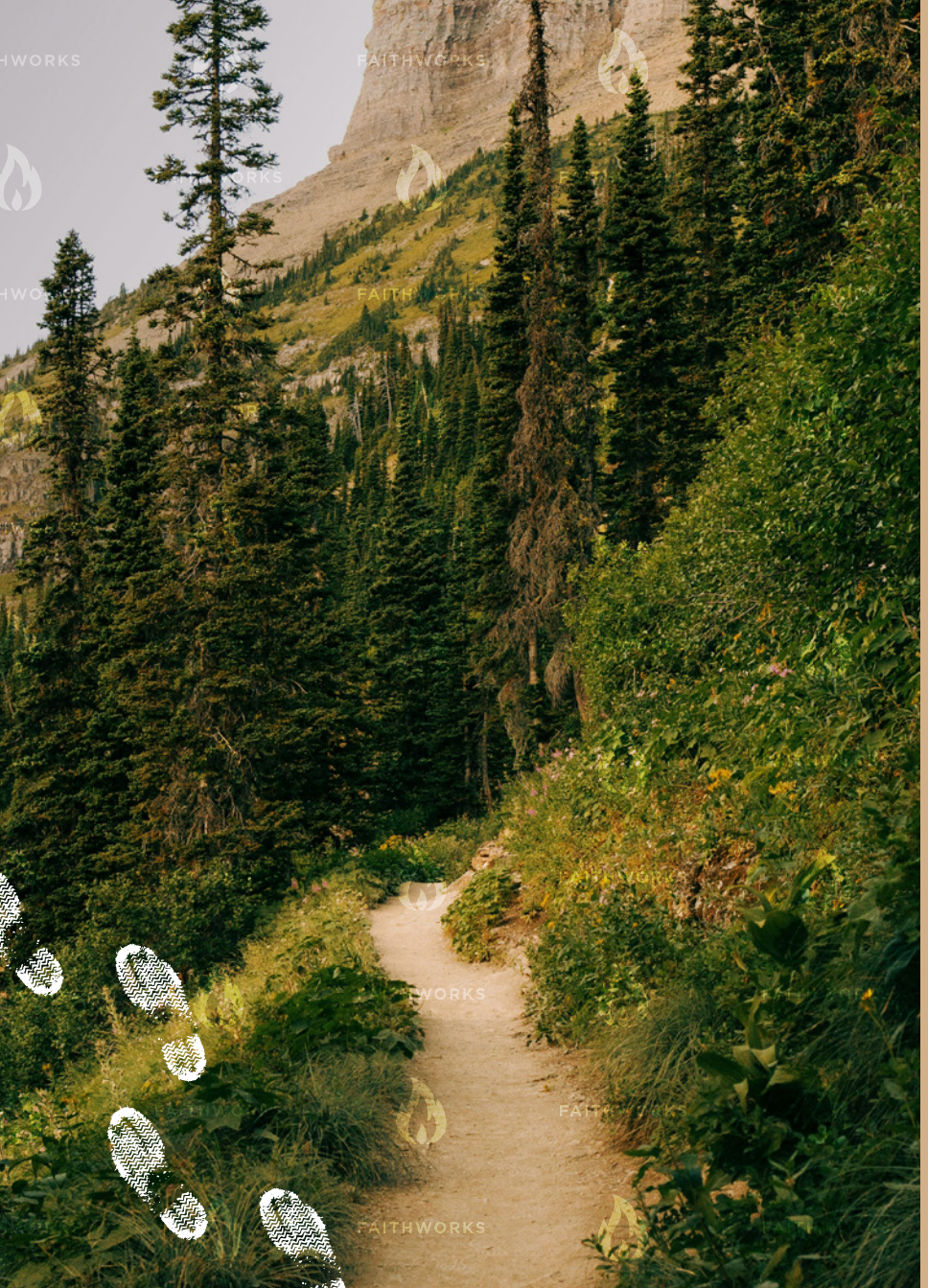
These are your first steps…

1. Know Christ for Yourself.
2. Obey the Lord in Believer's Baptism.
3. Learn to Talk to God and Hear From Him.
4. Enter into Fellowship with a Local Church.
5. Witness for Christ.

And as you take your first steps, you can be sure that the Lord will show you your next steps. God bless you as you continue your journey with Jesus.

Resources

Continue your first steps on your journey with Jesus by visiting the companion web page for this resource at enjoyingthejourney.org/first-steps



My First 30 Days in God's Word

This plan is designed to help you develop a habit of daily Bible study. It is important to set aside time each day to study God's Word, allowing Him to speak to you and providing you the opportunity to learn more about Him and His plan for your life.

Each day includes a passage of Scripture to read, a summary of things to look for during your study time, and other Scriptures that you can examine to learn more about the passage and to help you see how the entire Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, teach the same truths and point to the same Savior of the world: Jesus Christ!

Ask your pastor or a faithful member of your church family to join you in this 30-day plan, then let each other know at least one thing you learned from your daily reading.

Day 1

Reading: John 1

Things to Look For: Jesus is the Creator God. Jesus is the Word made flesh. John the Baptist points others to Jesus. Jesus calls His first disciples.

Further Reading: Genesis 1, Colossians 1

Day 2

Reading: John 2

Things to Look For: Jesus performs His first miracle. Jesus expels the money changers from the temple. Jesus prophecies of His resurrection.

Further Reading: Psalm 66

Day 3

Reading: John 3

Things to Look For: Jesus is visited by Nicodemus. Jesus explains salvation to him. John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Savior.

Further Reading: Numbers 21:4-9, Deuteronomy 18:18

Day 4

Reading: John 4:1-30

Things to Look For: Jesus shares the gospel with the woman at the well in Samaria.

Further Reading: Genesis 33, Isaiah 12

Day 5

Reading: John 4:31-54

Things to Look For: Jesus explains His work to the disciples, saves others in Samaria, and heals a nobleman's son.

Further Reading: Job 23:12, Psalm 63:5, Psalm 119:103, Jeremiah 15:16

Day 6

Reading: John 5

Things to Look For: Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees are offended at His work. Jesus identifies Himself as God's Son.

Further Reading: Isaiah 40, Jeremiah 17

Day 7

Reading: John 6:1-40

Things to Look For: Jesus feeds 5,000, walks on the water, and identifies Himself as the bread of life.

Further Reading: Exodus 16, Psalm 78

Day 8

Reading: John 6:41-71

Things to Look For: Jesus explains how He is the bread of life.

Further Reading: Isaiah 54

Day 9

Reading: John 7

Things to Look For: Jesus teaches in Jerusalem. The Pharisees dispute with Him. There is debate on whether Jesus is the Messiah.

Further Reading: Micah 5, Isaiah 9

Day 10

Reading: John 8:1-30

Things to Look For: The Pharisees confront Jesus with a woman caught in adultery. Jesus identifies Himself as the light of the world. The Pharisees debate Jesus concerning His identity.

Further Reading: Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22, Isaiah 60

Day 11

Reading: John 8:31-59

Things to Look For: Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of God. Jesus uses the phrase "I AM", the name God used with Moses in Exodus.

Further Reading: Exodus 3

Day 12

Reading: John 9

Things to Look For: Jesus heals a blind man. The Pharisees confront the blind man about the healing.

Further Reading: Isaiah 35

Day 13

Reading: John 10

Things to Look For: Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd. The religious leaders confront Jesus about His identity, and seek to kill Him.

Further Reading: Psalm 23

Day 14

Reading: John 11:1-27

Things to Look For: Lazarus dies, Jesus travels to Judaea to raise him from the dead.

Further Reading: 1 Corinthians 15

Day 15

Reading: John 11:28-57

Things to Look For: Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. The Pharisees plot to kill Jesus.

Further Reading: Hebrews 4

Day 16

Reading: John 12

Things to Look For: Mary anoints Jesus with costly ointment. Jesus enters Jerusalem with the multitude celebrating Him. Jesus prophesies of His death. Some believe in Jesus, but others do not believe.

Further Reading: Zechariah 9:9, Isaiah 53

Day 17

Reading: John 13

Things to Look For: Jesus eats the Last Supper with His disciples and washes their feet. Jesus prophesies of His betrayal by Judas and His denial by Peter.

Further Reading: Psalm 41

Day 18

Reading: John 14

Things to Look For: Jesus prophesies of His death, His departure to prepare a place for His people. Jesus promises the disciples that He will send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them.

Further Reading: Isaiah 26

Day 19

Reading: John 15

Things to Look For: Jesus is the vine and His followers are the branches. Jesus offers true joy. Jesus commands His disciples to love one another.

Further Reading: Psalm 69

Day 20

Reading: John 16

Things to Look For: Jesus warns of persecution and sorrow, but ultimately joy and victory. The Holy Spirit will guide His disciples into all truth.

Further Reading: Acts 2

Day 21

Reading: John 17

Things to Look For: Jesus prays for God to receive glory, for His disciples, and for all future believers.

Further Reading: Philippians 2

Day 22

Reading: John 18

Things to Look For: Jesus is betrayed by Judas. Peter denies Jesus. Jesus is placed on trial.

Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:21-25

Day 23

Reading: John 19

Things to Look For: Jesus is beaten, crucified, and placed in the tomb.

Further Reading: Psalm 22, Zechariah 12:10

Day 24

Reading: John 20

Things to Look For: Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb. Jesus appears to His disciples. Thomas doubts until He sees Jesus.

Further Reading: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24

Day 25

Reading: John 21

Things to Look For: Jesus appears to His disciples. Jesus instructs Peter to love and lead His followers as a shepherd who loves and feeds his sheep.

Further Reading: Ezekiel 34

Day 26

Reading: 1 John 1

Things to Look For: Jesus is the Word made flesh. Jesus is the light and has no darkness.

Further Reading: Proverbs 8:22-30, Revelation 21

Day 27

Reading: 1 John 2

Things to Look For: Believers should not sin, but should confess their sins. Believers should keep His commandments, love one another. Believers should not love the world, and should beware of false teachers.

Further Reading: Psalm 103

Day 28

Reading: 1 John 3

Things to Look For: Those who believe on Jesus are brought into the family of God. We are to love one another and keep His commandments.

Further Reading: Genesis 4

Day 29

Reading: 1 John 4

Things to Look For: Believers should beware false teachers and should love one another.

Further Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 13:1-5, Leviticus 19:18

Day 30

Reading: 1 John 5

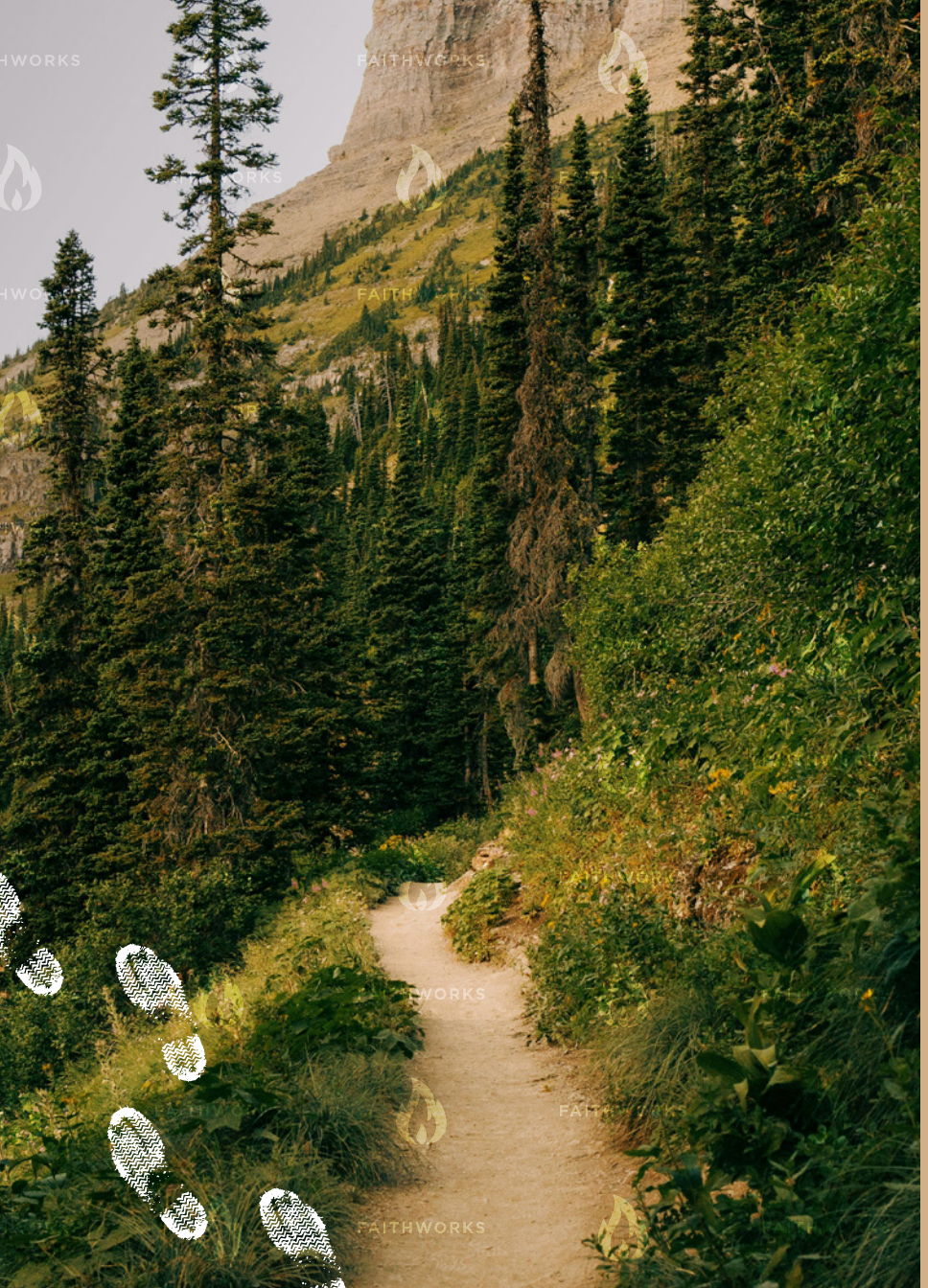
Things to Look For: Believers must have faith in Jesus Christ to overcome the world. Believers can be confident in the knowledge that they have eternal life.

Further Reading: Romans 8

7 Suggestions for Bible Reading

"...give attendance to reading..."
1 Timothy 4:13

1. **Read systematically:** Have a definite plan as you approach God's Word.
2. **Read slowly:** Meditate on God's truth.
3. **Read prayerfully:** Ask for wisdom and respond to God in prayer.
4. **Read verbally:** Allow your eyes, ears, mind, and mouth to concentrate on the Scriptures.
5. **Read consistently:** Set a specific time and place to meet God and guard it jealously.
6. **Read obediently:** Identify what action you will take from each portion of Scripture.
7. **Read purposefully:** Write down truths God speaks to you about and share them with someone else.



Enjoying The Journey

Life is a short trip to somewhere forever!

How will you make the trip?

We live in a mobile society and it seems that everyone is in a hurry to get where they are going! Life itself is a journey and all of us are headed somewhere forever. An all-wise God has designed it so that those who follow His way can enjoy Heaven someday and also enjoy the journey today. The Bible, God's Word to man, is the roadmap for time and eternity.

Begin by determining your destination.

Every journey begins by settling where you are going. Without direction, we all just wander aimlessly through life, searching for meaning and purpose. Thousands of years ago a prophet named Isaiah wrote, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*[1] Some things never change!

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."[2] On our own we all go away from God. This is why Jesus Christ came: to take our sin and give us His salvation. Only He can return us to the path we were created to walk and bring us to God. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*[3]

Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose from the dead to offer us eternal life, and stands ready now to forgive our sins. But each of us must choose for ourselves if we will follow our way or His. When Jesus was on earth He said, *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be*

1 Isaiah 53:6

2 Romans 3:23

3 John 14:6

which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." [4]

There are only two destinations: eternity in Heaven with God or separated from God forever in Hell. All roads cannot lead to the same place. Our way leads us from God; Christ's way leads us to God. If you continue on the path you are on now, where will you spend eternity? You must determine your destination.

Discover the companionship of Christ.

The journey is always better with a companion, someone with whom we share both the joys and trials of the trip. This is why Jesus Christ came to this earth. He traveled this same road for thirty-three years. The Son of God is not a person far away who, *"cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."* [5] He knows where you are and what you are facing!

Even more, He wants to make the journey with you right now. This personal relationship begins at the moment that

4 Matthew 7:13-14

5 Hebrews 4:15

you place your faith in Him and call on Him to be your Savior. *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."* [6]

When a person comes to know Christ, two things are made sure: they will live with Christ forever in Heaven, and Christ comes to live in their heart now! In one of the most famous psalms, Psalm 23, David explains it this way, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."* [7]

To follow Christ is to have Him make the journey with you, never alone! In some of His last words to the first disciples He said, *"...I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."* [8] There will be difficulties along the way, but He will guard us and guide us at every step.

Know what to do at important intersections.

Intersections are turning points. At each of them there is a decision to be made. Life is full of decisions, but the most important ones are the ones that affect eternity. Today you

6 Romans 10:9

7 Psalm 23:6

8 Matthew 28:20

are standing at one of those crossroads. You will either choose to follow Christ or to continue on your own way. Remember that a wrong turn doesn't lead to the right place! The right turn is to repent and believe on Christ.[9]

There are two paths and we all must decide which one we will take. Jesus said, *"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*[10] Will you believe on Christ today?

Call on Him now! "Dear God, be merciful to me a sinner. I know that you died for me and believe that you rose from the dead. Please forgive my sin and come into my life. I trust you now as my personal Savior. Thank you for giving me the free gift of eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen."

This is the beginning of your journey with Jesus. He promises those who belong to Him, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*[11] We would love to hear from you and help you as you begin to walk with Christ.

9 Acts 20:21

10 John 3:18

11 Hebrews 13:5

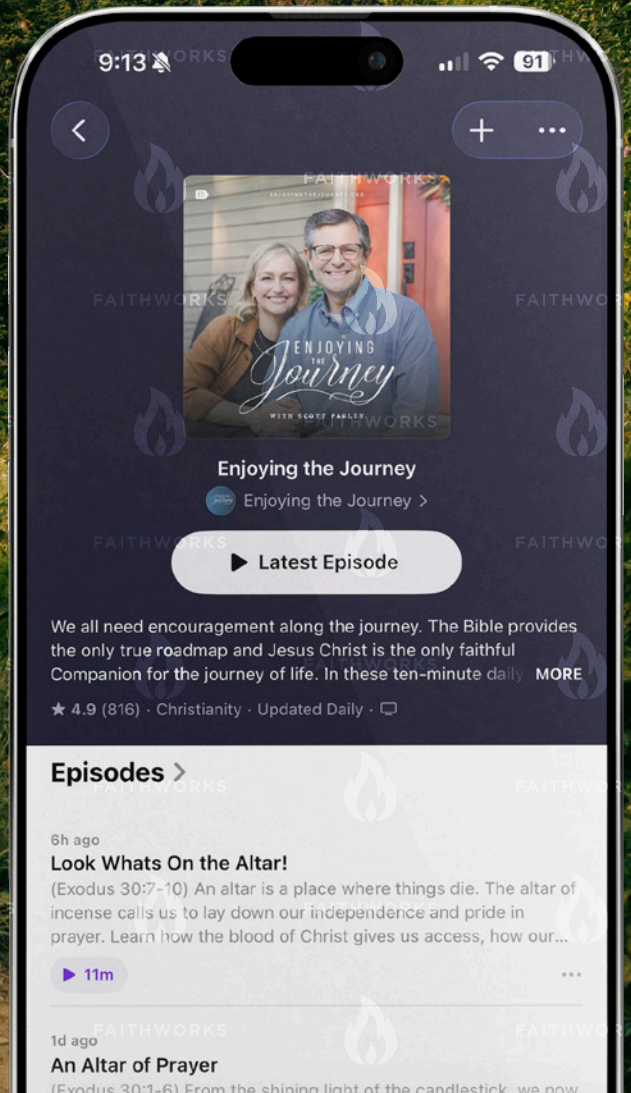
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Begin your journey with Jesus.

The journey of life is made one step at a time. If you desire to move forward in your faith, then you must begin where you are! Determine to take the next step with God today.

This resource was designed to guide you as you take your first steps in the right direction. Read this book with your Bible near, and take the time to look up each Scripture reference. This will help you to get better acquainted with your Bible and will give you a greater understanding of how to apply the truth.

It is our prayer that, as you walk with us through God's Word, you will discover the joy of journeying with Jesus each day.



For nearly twenty years **Scott Pauley** served as an assistant pastor, college administrator, and Bible instructor. He now travels extensively as an evangelist across America and in several foreign countries. His passion is to preach the gospel, teach the Word of God, and reach this generation for Christ. Scott can be heard daily on the *Enjoying the Journey* podcast and radio program.

ENJOYING THE Journey

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