



If the whole idea of being a Christian is foreign to you, this study should help answer some of your questions. The textbook for the following six lessons is the Bible. So before you get started, make sure you have a Bible, a notebook (or an open computer page) and some colored pencils so you can highlight some of the Bible verses that you find especially meaningful.

Here's an overview of what you will learn:

- Lesson 1: What is “the gospel” and why does it matter?
- Lesson 2: What is so special about the Bible?
- Lesson 3: What is prayer, and how and when do I pray?
- Lesson 4: Do people really depend on God? Does He want to be *that* involved in my life?
- Lesson 5: What if I still keep sinning, even though I've been saved? Aren't real Christians better than that?
- Lesson 6: Why do I need to get involved with other Christians, and is church really that important?

Lesson 1: What is “the gospel” and why does it matter?

A few “inside” words that you will hear Christians talk about are *saved, born again and the gospel*.

These words and ideas are found in the Bible, and that’s why they come up in conversation among Christians. In fact, these words define what Christians are— individuals who have heard, believed and accepted *the gospel*, and upon so doing, they become *saved or born again*. It changes their lives.

So, what is the gospel? By definition, it means *good news*. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul defines it for us: *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.* (1 Cor. 15:3-4)

Foundational facts

Before you go any further, make sure you understand the fine points of the gospel. Following is the path of understanding. Read the questions on the left and underline or highlight the words that answer the questions from the Bible verses on the right. Make notes of things from the verses that impress you.

Why doesn’t everyone go to heaven?	<i>For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)</i>
What is the price we pay for our sin?	<i>For the wages of sin is death...(Romans 6:23a)</i>
Now you know that we all die because we’ve all sinned. What did God do to counter our death-doom?	<p><i>But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)</i></p> <p><i>All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)</i></p> <p><i>For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened (made alive) by the Spirit: (1 Peter 3:18)</i></p>
What does the Bible instruct you do in light of your understanding of the above three points (of sin, separation from God, and solution provided by Christ)?	<p><i>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)</i></p> <p><i>For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)</i></p>

The correct response is to believe, admit and receive what the Bible says: you have sinned (done wrong things in your life) and therefore you are separated from God. The penalty for that sin is eternal punishment. While God is just and has to punish sin, He is also loving. Therefore, He provided the way of escape by the death and resurrection of

Jesus. This whole concept is *the gospel*—the good news. There’s a way out of the condemned life you are living and into a new life of faith in Christ’s good work on your behalf.

Can you think of a time when you grasped the idea that your sin (even just one sin, let alone a life of sins) separates you from God, putting you at odds with Him, and the only way to be right with Him is to accept what He did for you on the cross?

If you distinctly remember hearing this, believing it and receiving what He did for you by praying and asking Him to come into your life and forgive you for your sins, then you are *saved*. That means saved from your sins and the penalty of punishment that awaited you.

The other term for what happened when you accepted Christ is *born again*. You have to be born again in order to have eternal life with Him in heaven after you die. Jesus plainly said so Himself. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* (John 3:3)

You may have heard pieces of all this and previously grasped a little of it, but you aren’t sure if you are saved or born again. One way to tell if you really understood and received salvation is by your life. Did it change? Here’s what the Bible says will happen if you truly understand, believe and receive His gift of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection on your behalf: *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)

If you don’t have a transformed life (and you will know if you do), then you probably have not understood and applied the gospel. It’s something that happens in your mind first as you understand what Jesus did and why He did it. Then you apply it to your heart by admitting it or confessing it as true on your behalf.

Remember the verses you read above: *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)

<p>If you can think of the time, write the date or the month or the year in the front of your Bible. You will need to refer back to that time many times as you grow closer to God and face the doubts that are bound to come.</p>	<p>If you cannot think of a time like that and you aren’t sure you ever have turned your life over to God and asked Jesus to come into your life and forgive you for your sins, don’t go any further in this study yet. Read the verses again carefully and pray confessing your new understanding of the verses and what Jesus did for you. Ask him to come into your life and forgive you for your sins. Then, be sure to tell a pastor or someone you trust as a Christian. You will want to discuss this with them.</p>
--	---

Facts versus feelings

Regardless of how you feel, if you have made that life commitment to Christ and you are trusting him for eternal life, you are a child of God. Following is the key passage to assure you that you are saved.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 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. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:11-15)

Write the answers to these questions, making sure that your answers come from what you read in the above verses. You may want to highlight the answers as you pick them out of the verses:

1. Based on these verses, how would you tell someone you know that you are saved?
2. If you wake up tomorrow morning and don't feel like you think a saved person should feel, how could you convince yourself you really are saved based on these verses?
3. Which would be better for you to trust, your feelings or what God said?

Trust issues

Understand the biggest lesson you will learn from now on: You have an absolute authority to rule your life now. That will be God and his word, the Bible.

You have transferred your trust from whatever you were trusting before to Jesus alone to save you from sin and its power and consequences. Now you want to take another daily step to trust him and what he said more than you trust your own feelings or intellect. After all, doesn't it make more sense to trust the mind of your Creator God than to trust in your limited understanding? He knows where you've been and where you're going much better than you do.

Remember, your new challenge is to trust what He said more than you trust your own feelings and desires.

At the heart of your new life in Christ is your new belief in him. You may have believed in him intellectually before, but now you really believe him. Another word for believe is "entrust" or "to place full reliance on him."

For example, you may look at a chair and think it could hold you up. That is not true "belief." You show that you really believe it will hold you up if you actually take your weight off your feet and sit in it. In the same way, you can say you believe in Jesus, but that isn't real life-altering belief until you give up your self-reliance and put your full trust in him. It's abandoning what you were relying on before and giving your faith to him.

Given that understanding, read the verses on the left below. Each contains a promise, which is underlined. In the box after each verse, write the conditions a person must meet to receive that promise.

<i>He that believeth on the Son <u>hath everlasting life</u>: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36)</i>	
<i>Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, <u>hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.</u> (John 5:24)</i>	
<i>For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him <u>should not perish, but have everlasting life.</u> (John 3:16)</i>	

Family matters

One last thing. You were born into God’s family when you trusted Christ as your savior. It’s called being “born again.” (*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3:3*) You became a son of God (mentioned in John 1:12 above.) That means you’re in God’s family now. You are his child.

When a child is born into a family, that child is always that parent’s child. It’s the same way in God’s family. You don’t have to live in fear that someday you won’t be his child anymore. God holds onto his children and doesn’t let them go.

So don’t ever let a little voice in your head, or anyone else, tell you that you really aren’t saved or that you can’t know for sure you’re going to heaven. The verses you’ve studied in this lesson tell you otherwise. You will now trust what God says more than you will trust your feelings or what others say.

Lesson 2: What is so special about the Bible?

When you started your new life of faith in Jesus Christ, you started a new relationship. You became a child of God. You may not know what all that means right now, but no doubt, you have some inkling that your future will be different than your past.

You have been adopted into God’s family through the death of Christ on your behalf. God, your new father, has much to say to you and teach you. You’ll learn about that in this lesson. You have a lot to say to him as well. You do that through prayer, and you will learn about that in the next lesson.

One of the ways God speaks to you and directs you is through the book He left for you, the Bible. It's a supernatural book. God guided 40 authors over a span of 1,500 years to write words supernaturally inspired by him. The Bible is made up of 66 separate books, all providing a balance and full understanding of what God wants us to know historically, prophetically, emotionally and instructionally.

For now, it's important for you to start a new habit of reading something from the Bible every day. This is how you will get God's perspective on any subject of life.

Familiar comparisons

God compares the Bible (referred to as "his word" from now on) to various things you are familiar with. Read the verses below and underline or highlight what God compares his word to. In the space next to the verse, record why you think God must have compared his word, to the thing He compares it to.

<p><i>Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalms 119:105)</i></p>	
<p><i>As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: (1 Peter 2:2)</i></p>	
<p><i>For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)</i></p>	
<p><i>And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. (Luke 4:4)</i></p>	

Instruction manual

One of the benefits of being a child of God is that you have someone to guide you through life. He knows what direction to take you, because He made you. On your own, you stumble around. But He knows exactly where you are and where you need to be.

One of the ways He guides you is through his written word. There are many promises and commands in the Bible, and you would do well to hang on to the promises and observe the commands.

You may want to get some colored pencils and start highlighting verses in your Bible so you can find them again at a glance. As you read through the Bible on your own and come across a promise or command, take out your colored pencils and start coloring!

The verses below are just a small sampling of the fabulous promises God has made that you can take to heart. As you grow older in the faith, you will learn how to trust God more to fulfill these promises. Just as when you first meet others, you are reluctant to trust them, so you might be reluctant to trust God to keep these promises since you don't know Him well and haven't known him very long. But over time, you will be able to automatically trust Him and avoid the automatic worry or fear that may sometimes plague you.

Read the following verses, paying attention to the promise, which is underlined. Highlight or underline the condition you must meet, according to the verse, for the promise to be fulfilled.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

While discovering God's promises provides you an opportunity to trust God, discovering His commands provides an opportunity to obey God. Trust and obey. Those are so foundational to having a close relationship with God.

Following are some commands He gives. He doesn't dish those out arbitrarily. There are reasons and benefits for obeying what He says. Even if you don't fully understand now, develop the attitude that you want to do whatever He asks you to do.

Read the following verses and notice the verbs (or action words) underlined. They are the commands. Write beside the verses why you believe it's important to follow that particular command.

<i>And <u>be ye kind</u> one to another, <u>tenderhearted</u>, <u>forgiving one another</u>, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)</i>	
--	--

<p><i>Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.</i> (Philippians 2:3)</p>	
<p><i>And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.</i> (1 John 3:23)</p>	
<p><i>Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.</i> (2 Timothy 2:15)</p>	

Reading schedule

Examining individual verses as you just did is valuable to your understanding of God, but what will help you most is to read through whole books of the Bible with a notebook and pen. That way you can get the context of what God is trying to say and you can write down your impressions, like a journal. It may help you remember what you read. And you can read back through your notes at any time.

So where should you start reading? Should you start with the very first book and plow on through? You could do that. But as a new Christian, you might want to start with the books of the Bible that talk about Jesus. That would be Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These books are called “The Gospels.” They were written by four men who walked with Jesus and recorded what they saw and heard. Much of the information in these four books is the same, but from a slightly different perspective. Looking at Christ’s life four times is like having a multidimensional view of Jesus. Many suggest that you start with the Gospel of John (this is different than the small book of 1 John in the back of the Bible.) Start with John and notice what Jesus was like and how He handled people. Notice how strongly He stood up for the truth, but how compassionate He was toward those in need. Look at what He said about himself and why He came. This will help you understand and appreciate your salvation much more.

After you have read the four Gospels, you may want to read the books written by the Apostle Paul. There is much practical instruction in these New Testament books, which are Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

Go the distance

Every effort you make to understand the Bible will probably do more than anything else in helping you learn more about God and how to live and trust him. Again, you’ve just started a new relationship with the Creator of the universe who has a plan for your life. You’re going to find that plan largely in the Bible.

Besides reading God's word, you want to be sure to meditate on it. Other words for *meditate* are *mull over, think deeply about, ponder...* God promises benefits to those who meditate on his word. According to the verses below, what are the benefits of meditating on God's word? Underline the benefits.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (Psalms 1:2-3)

And so, how do you meditate on his word? One way is to read a verse or passage several times, then stop and think about how it applies to your life. You might ask yourself: Is there a command I should obey in here? Is there a promise I should trust? Is there a sin I should avoid? Did someone do or say something here that would be a good example for me to follow? You could think these things, but for some people, it might be a good idea to write these things in a notebook. Take notes when you read of things that impress you. You could even write prayers asking God to help you obey what you read or help you understand it better, or help you apply it.

And finally, a great way to make sure you grow in your understanding of God's word and to help you meditate on it is to memorize verses. In fact, that suggestion comes from his word. Read the following verses and underline why the writers said they memorized or "hid God's word" in their heart.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. (Psalms 119:11)

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. (Psalms 40:8)

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)

A good way to memorize verses is to write them out on 3- by 5-inch cards and carry them with you. Review them several times during the day. When you move on to the next verse, keep reviewing the one you already memorized. After about seven days, you'll have them down well if you review every day. Then keep adding verses, and keep reviewing your old ones.

Personal Application

- Get a notebook that you plan to have beside you when you read and study the Bible so you can take notes. This notebook will also come in handy for the next lesson.
- Get some colored pencils so you can highlight meaningful verses.
- Pick out a verse or two from the first lesson, and a verse or two from this lesson to memorize and write them out so you can carry them with you. Start to memorize, and remember to memorize the verse references with the verses so you'll know where to find them when you want to read them straight from the Bible or tell someone else about them.

Lesson 3: What is prayer, and how and when do I pray?

You know you have started a new relationship with your Creator God and his son Jesus Christ, and that eventually, you will get to know him so well, it will be second nature for you to trust him and make him a part of your everyday life.

Just as you keep your relationships going and growing through communication/conversation, it's no different in your relationship with God. He speaks to you through His word. Part of that understanding you gain from reading the Bible comes from the fact that when you trusted Jesus Christ, the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, came to live in you and now helps you to understand the Bible in a way you never understood it before. Perhaps you've already noticed that the Bible makes more sense to you than it used to.

You communicate with God through prayer. Until now, you may have thought of prayer as a desperate way to get what you want. But there is much more to it. You don't talk to those you love just to get something out of them. You communicate what you are thinking; you express your love; you sometimes ask questions. In a conversation, you listen and respond and explain what you think.

Now imagine how that applies to prayer. When you read the Bible and God impresses your heart with a promise, a command or an example, you immediately respond. It might be a simple sentence of thanks for that promise or a simple sentence of affirmation—telling God you want to do just what He said. You don't have to save up all your thoughts for the end of the day to say just before you go to bed. Talk to God throughout the day.

God's thoughts about prayer

Notice how God views prayer from these Bible verses. After reading the verses below, underline the reason, assurance or promise the writer gives for praying.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:6-7)

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Unanswered and answered prayer

Sometimes you will pray and become discouraged when the prayer isn't answered. There are reasons why some prayers are not answered. Write out these verses and highlight the reason given. Then note what you could do to remedy the situation.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Psalms 66:18)

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination. (Proverbs 28:9)

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:2-3)

God loves to answer prayer. He likes it when we humbly come to him with our true needs and desires.

In the verses below, underline the assurances or promises God gives us about answering prayer.

The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. (Proverbs 15:29)

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. (Jeremiah 33:3)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Key prayer factor

These last verses talk about praying according to God's will. One of the best ways to pray according to his will is to find scriptures that tell you what His will is and pray

them back to God. For example, find some promises or statements about God, and ask God to show you those promises and to fulfill those statements. You know they are His will because He already said they are His will.

Here's an illustration. Look at Isaiah 26:3: "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*" What you know about God's will from this verse is that He wants you to have peace, and you can have peace if you keep your mind on Him. He honors with peace those who trust Him. So here's a sample prayer you might pray: "God, my heart is agitated and in turmoil lately. Help me to be at peace as I turn my mind toward you and trust you rather than trust in my circumstances."

Here is another sample. Psalms 62:8 says, "*Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.*" What you know about God from this verse is that He wants you to pour out your heart before Him, and that He is a refuge, or safe haven. Are you feeling anxious and adrift? Here's a heart cry to God that you might express after reading this verse: "Thank you that you are a refuge and a safe place I can go to right now. I admit that my natural inclination is to fret, and my stomach is in knots. But you say to trust in you at all times. I pour out my anxiety to you right now, and I come to you to rest for a few minutes. Please help me to trust you more."

So, now you see that Bible reading and prayer go together like a hand in a glove. Your best prayers will always be those that you pray in response to reading the Bible. Remember, it's this two-way communication that's so vital in any relationship, and it's the assurance that you are praying according to His will.

And don't worry about how you find those verses to pray back to God. In time, you'll see that nearly anything you read in the Bible can spark a prayer. If you're reading about the mistakes the Israelites made in the Old Testament, you can stop and pray, "God, help me not to make those mistakes." If you're reading verses of thanksgiving in the book of Psalms, finish reading the chapter and stop and thank God for the same things the Psalmist thanked God for. You can be assured that God will listen to those prayers because they are in response to what He said.

Here's an assignment. Go back to lesson 2 about the Bible where you looked at promises and consider what you could pray from several of these verses. Write out those prayers in your notebook. (By the way, writing prayers is very helpful to some people. Consider starting a notebook of prayers.)

Types of prayers

Remember that every prayer isn't asking God for something, just like your conversations with others don't always include asking for things. Notice types of prayers from the following verses. Underline the things that impress you.

Praise prayers. God proves that He is awesome in many ways. One type of prayer is to acknowledge something about God and let Him know you love that about him.

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. (Psalms 139:14)

O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. (Psalms 104:24)

I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. (Psalms 118:21)

Can you see yourself praying prayers like that? God would love it if you spontaneously praised him for something awesome He did.

Specific personal requests. Learn what God says about your physical and emotional needs from the following verses, then you will know how best to pray according to His will.

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:27-34)

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. (Psalms 34:15-17)

Praying for others. If your needs will be met by God through prayer, so will the needs of others. From these verses, highlight what you learn about what to pray for others. Notice that the most important thing to pray for others isn't necessarily their health and happiness.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being

fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; (Colossians 1:9-11)

The practice of prayer.

Prayer is a life-altering habit to develop in your life. Besides the quick prayers you breathe throughout the day in response to what is happening at the moment, it's a good idea to set aside some time to humbly come before God with the requests that are important to you. This could be right after the daily time you set aside to read the Bible. As you have a Bible-reading journal, it's a great idea to have a prayer journal where you write the prayer topics for each day, and next to them you can write the date they were answered. This will give you something to look back at to show you God's faithfulness.

As part of your prayer journal, you might want to start a "thankful" section. That is, each day, write two things you are thankful to God for. This will help you develop an attitude of gratitude, which will help prevent you from developing a negative attitude.

Your life will change, and it will be obvious to all when you develop habits of reading your Bible, trusting God, being thankful and praying about your needs.

Here's a parting verse to memorize: John 16:24, *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

Personal application

- Get a prayer journal. It could be part of your Bible notebook. Make sure to include a "thankful" section in it.
- Select a time of day and place where you will meet with God each day for a personal session with him.

Lesson 4: Dependence on God

The last two lessons (Bible and prayer) were concrete things to work on in your new relationship with God. This lesson is more about the proper attitude and response toward God as you grow. If you can develop the right view and response to God early, you will be well on your way to a solid relationship with him.

Think of this as the parent/child relationship that it is. Wouldn't every parent love to have an obedient child rather than a strong-willed child who bucks at every suggestion and idea? It's the same with your heavenly father. When He teaches, He wants you to listen.

But your heavenly father is raising you with a different goal. Your earthly parents raised you to be independent so that you could eventually live on your own. God raises you to be dependent on him. He wants you to turn to him continually for guidance, assurance, love and support. He created you to have a close relationship with him—forever. He made you. He is your owner, and His word is your owner's manual. He knows what's best for you. Let this idea sink in. Your goal from here on is not to try and make it on your own, but to try to understand and trust God more.

God is in control

As you get to know God better, you'll learn more of His awesome characteristics. Eventually, you'll be able to rely on Him for those qualities. For example, He is merciful and gracious. He is also patient, while at the same time He is just. Those are only a few of His qualities. But for this study, it's important to know that He is all-knowing and all-wise, therefore, He has everything under control and is in charge. You will go a long way more quickly when you understand that and learn to relax and not feel you have to be in control yourself.

Read the following verses and underline or highlight what impresses you. The word *counsel* in the first two verses means *advice* or *purpose*.

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. (Psalms 33:11)

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand. (Proverbs 19:21)

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

Trust Promises

Part of God being in control and directing your steps is that He has a purpose for you. Perhaps, before you accepted Christ as your savior, you didn't have a purpose. Well, now you do. Your purpose is to learn to trust and follow God's purpose for you more and more. Ultimately, you want to learn to trust and follow Him automatically, even when you don't see your way ahead. God offers promises to those who trust Him. To the right of the verses below, write out the promise He makes to those who trust Him.

<i>Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.</i> (Proverbs 3:5-6)	
<i>Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.</i> (Psalms 37:5)	
<i>Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.</i> (Isaiah 26:3)	

Humble Pie

The easiest path to trusting God with all concerns of your life is to learn to be humble and admit that God knows what is best and you don't. This is called being humble. It's the opposite of being self-willed.

<p><i>For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (Isaiah 57:15)</i></p>	<p>What does God do for the humble?</p>
<p><i>He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8)</i></p>	<p>Why walk humbly with God?</p>
<p><i>But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:6-7)</i></p>	<p>How do you make yourself humble?</p>

Pride

Knowing that God is in control, why wouldn't anyone want to trust Him rather than rely on their own senses? It has to do with the opposite of being humble. It's pride, and we all have pride built in. We need to learn to harness it. Pride is the sin that turned Satan into the enemy of God. Discover what God says about pride from the verses below. Just as there are promises for being humble, there are promises for pride. Write out the consequences of pride and the benefits of being humble next to the verses below.

<p><i>A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. (Proverbs 29:23)</i></p>	
<p><i>Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)</i></p>	
<p><i>Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the</i></p>	

<i>proud.</i> (Proverbs 16:19)	
--------------------------------	--

Personal application

- Write out the most important thing you learned from this lesson that you want to remember.

- Write a quick prayer in response.

Lesson 5: Victory over sin

By now in your Christian life, perhaps you are experiencing times of nothing special, especially when you compare yourself with other Christians. While they might look happy and like they are doing well and have it all together, you may feel that deep down, you still have many of the same struggles and bad attitudes you had before. You may not feel charitable toward others, and you still sin. It may even cause you to wonder if you really are a Christian. After all, aren't Christians better than this? You expected better things than challenges and defeat.

Well, you're not alone. Most Christians start out this way. The reason you feel these struggles so keenly now is because your conscience is heightened. Before, it didn't matter to you that you sinned. It was normal and didn't seem like any big deal. Now you are more aware of wrongdoings and it pricks your heart when you do some of the things you did before. It's going to take some time to get rid of some bad habits and attitudes.

But there are some promises that will help assure you that change will happen. In fact, if you think about it, maybe you already have noticed some changes. Maybe you didn't used to particularly like people who were outspoken Christians. Now you seek them out to talk to them. Or perhaps you've noticed the sky seems bluer and the trees and flowers more beautiful. The creation just impresses you more. It's because you've met the Creator!

Here's a verse that tells you what that is all about:

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)

Write down any changes you've noticed in thought, attitude or action since you've become a Christian.

Holy Spirit

Another reason you are more keenly aware of your sin since becoming a Christian is that when you accepted Christ, you received the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Godhead came to reside in you.

The Bible says that now you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Now that you have the Holy Spirit inside you, you have help figuring out when you've sinned, because the Holy Spirit pricks your heart and you have help overcoming that sin.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

When the Apostle Paul prayed for others, he prayed that the Holy Spirit would work in their hearts. Notice what he prayed.

...That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; (Ephesians 3:16)

Though you have the Holy Spirit living in you, you also have your natural self that wants to please "me" rather than God. So there is inner turmoil—The Spirit of God vs. your human flesh.

One of your paths to victory will be to yield to God's Spirit when He convicts you of sin rather than give in to your natural desires. In the verses below, underline or highlight what you are instructed to do.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:1)

What to do

As much as you want to live right, you won't always succeed. You will still sin and disappoint God. Rather than give in to discouragement and frustration over it, learn to confess it right away. What promises does God make for those who confess their sins?

<i>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)</i>	
<i>He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)</i>	

The Bible talks very directly about the battle you have going on inside you. It's not only a battle with your flesh that doesn't want to obey God. It's a battle with another enemy. Read the following passage and notice what that battle is and how you are to fight. You might want to read it several times.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: (Ephesians 6:10-17)

The verses talk about the armour you are to wear in this spiritual battle. Notice the one offensive weapon mentioned. It's something you can attack with and stave off the enemy. It is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Now imagine how you would use that sword. The best example is how Jesus used the word of God as a sword to fight off Satan.

For this, you will want to get out your Bible and open it up to Matthew 4. Read verses 1-11. This was when Jesus was tempted of Satan three times, and each time, He answered Satan's sinful suggestions with Bible verses.

Let's look at the first of the three temptations here.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these

stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:1-4)

Notice He was tempted to follow Satan's suggestion where He was most vulnerable. Jesus was hungry. How did He handle that temptation?

And finally, there's another way to use the word of God in handling temptation. Remember in the lesson on prayer you learned about taking God's promises and praying them back to him? That is a way of using the word of God as a sword to fight off Satan. For example, read the following verse and highlight the promise.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Here is a sample prayer you might pray after reading that verse: "Father, I love you, but I'm struggling so much with _____. You said you won't let me be tempted beyond what I'm able to deal with. Please make a way of escape so I won't fall into this sin anymore." And don't just pray that once. Make it your heart cry.

In summary

This has been a heavy lesson, but important. The main point is that when you became a Christian, you became a new creation. You also received the Holy Spirit to help you live the Christian life. But you still have your old nature that doesn't necessarily want to do what God wants. You also have riled up Satan, who doesn't want to see you get closer to God.

So there's a battle that you probably never expected or experienced before. This is normal. The best way to fight these battles is to stay close to God in prayer and trusting Him, hanging onto the promises you find in the Bible. When you sin, confess it immediately and move on.

Personal application

Write down the verse or two from this lesson that meant the most to you. You may even want to start writing verse references in the front of your Bible so that when you are desperate for specific truth that you know you learned, but you can't remember where, you can look in the front of your Bible.

Lesson 6: Fellowship with other Christians

After Bible study and prayer, the thing that will help you grow most in your new Christian life is the fellowship you share with God and other Christians. They will become your closest confidants—even closer than your own family. That's because God and other Christians *are* your new family. God is your new heavenly Father, and other believers are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You share a oneness with them.

You may have noticed since you accepted Christ that you are drawn to other Christians. Over time, you will find that you want to spend more time and become closer friends with other believers than with those who don't share in this interest for spiritual things. This is normal. The Bible calls this affinity for other Christians brotherly love, and it is not only a natural outcome of knowing Christ, it is proof that you are a Christian.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death.” (1 John 3:14)

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35)

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” (1 Thessalonians 4:9)

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” (1 John 3:23)

Of the four verses above, underline the one that impresses you most.

What about church?

With all this in mind, you can see why it is important to find a good church. It's not only a great place to get to know other Christians, it's one of the means God will use to help you grow spiritually.

Someone once said that going to church is like gathering a bunch of coals together and lighting them on fire. They stay warm while they are together, but spread them out, and they quickly lose their heat.

Church is not only a place to be with other Christians, it provides the opportunity to learn more about the Lord and spiritual things. If it's a strong Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church, you will get the oxygen you need to carry you through another week. The perspective you get from the preaching and teaching will help you stay on track—along with the time you spend reading the Bible throughout the week. You will need the godly perspective in order to keep you from giving in to thoughts and ideas that are contrary to the way God thinks.

And one more great thing about church, it gives you a chance to participate and be an active member of a larger community. The Bible calls it the Body of Christ with Christ being the head, and all the members are different parts of the body, like hands, feet, eyes and ears. All the parts work to function together. And when they do, everyone is benefited.

<i>But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no</i>	What do you learn about the idea of being part of a body from these verses?
---	---

need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1 Corinthians 12:18-27)

The body of Christ will benefit you greatly, but keep in mind, you will also benefit it. It's a great place for you to be.

Now, a word about the church that you select. There are so many churches you could choose. How do you know if it's a really good one? It's important that you find one that teaches from the Bible and that uses it as its foundation. If there is a person who was instrumental in leading you to Christ, you might want to see what church he/she attends. If it's not possible to attend that church, ask that person to help you find a church.

Separation

As we wind up these beginning lessons to help you get on solid footing in your Christian life, let's look at one final thought on fellowship. Not only will you want to get closer to other believers, you will find that things, ideas and people you once loved will lose their attraction. That's normal, and it's also a sign that you have passed from your old life to a new life in Christ.

Read these verses and notice what you are to separate from and why.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. (Ephesians 5:11)

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:6-7)

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

These verses provide a reason why you will want to attach yourself with other believers. If you don't, you may gravitate back to your old group of friends with whom you no longer have as much in common. They may drag you back into your old life. Jump in with a group of Christians, even if you don't know what to expect.

Your final assignment is to pray and ask God to show you the group of believers/church you need to become involved with. Following are some closing verses with sample prayers you can pray.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!
(Psalms 133:1)

Prayer: Lord, how I would love to experience that unity with other Christians. Please lead me to the right church where I can fit in and grow spiritually.

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.
(Proverbs 27:17)

Prayer: Lord, I would love to have friends who are sharp in you and who can help me become sharp. Please lead me to those friends.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 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. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Prayer: Father, I can see from these verses that it's very important that I become involved in the lives of other believers and for them to become involved in my life. Please guide me to the right group.

Personal application

Write down the most important thing you learned from this lesson and how you plan to apply it to your life.