
My New Walk With God
BY MARK HOOVER

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01

Chapter One





I Just Prayed



“I just prayed a prayer to receive Jesus. Is it possible I’m really forgiven and now God’s child?”

There’s no doubt about it. The Bible offers you a promise in Romans:

For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (NLT)

So let’s unpack that. Something more basic had to happen inside you before you could pray that prayer. First, you heard the good news that Jesus died to pay for your sins and that he rose from the grave. Then, you believed that message, and only then did you pray for him to forgive and save you.

Look at what the Bible says in the very next verse:

But how can they call on him (pray to him) *to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? Romans 10:14 (NLT)*

Wasn’t that how it happened? Someone told us the good news, then we heard it, believed it, and called on Jesus to be our Savior.

The Most Important Thing

While you may have prayed a prayer to invite Jesus to come into your life, the thing that's most important is believing in (or placing your confidence in) Jesus for your salvation. Take a look at this long list of Scriptures that make this completely clear.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (NLT)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. John 3:36 (NIV)

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24 (NIV)

"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:40 (NIV)

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31 (NIV)

The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Acts 16:29-32 (NLT)

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. Romans 10:9-10 (NLT)

One of my favorite Scriptures puts it this way:

For it is by grace (God's gift) *you have been saved, through faith* (believing)*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)*




For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God...
Romans 10:10

02

Chapter Two





Believing

"How can I be sure I've truly believed?"

Let's think about some questions that might be on your mind right now. You may be wondering, "What does it mean to believe?" or "How can I know if I've truly believed?" After all, if believing is what it's all about when it comes to the most important things in your life (eternal life, the forgiveness of your sins, and having a personal relationship with Christ), then of course you want to be sure.

Perhaps an old story might help. Years ago, there was a man who did tightrope stunts across a great waterfall. He would walk across by himself, and then, much to the amazement of the crowd, he would push a wheelbarrow across.

After one such performance, he addressed the crowd, "How many of you believe I could push a man across in the wheelbarrow?"

Many hands shot up.

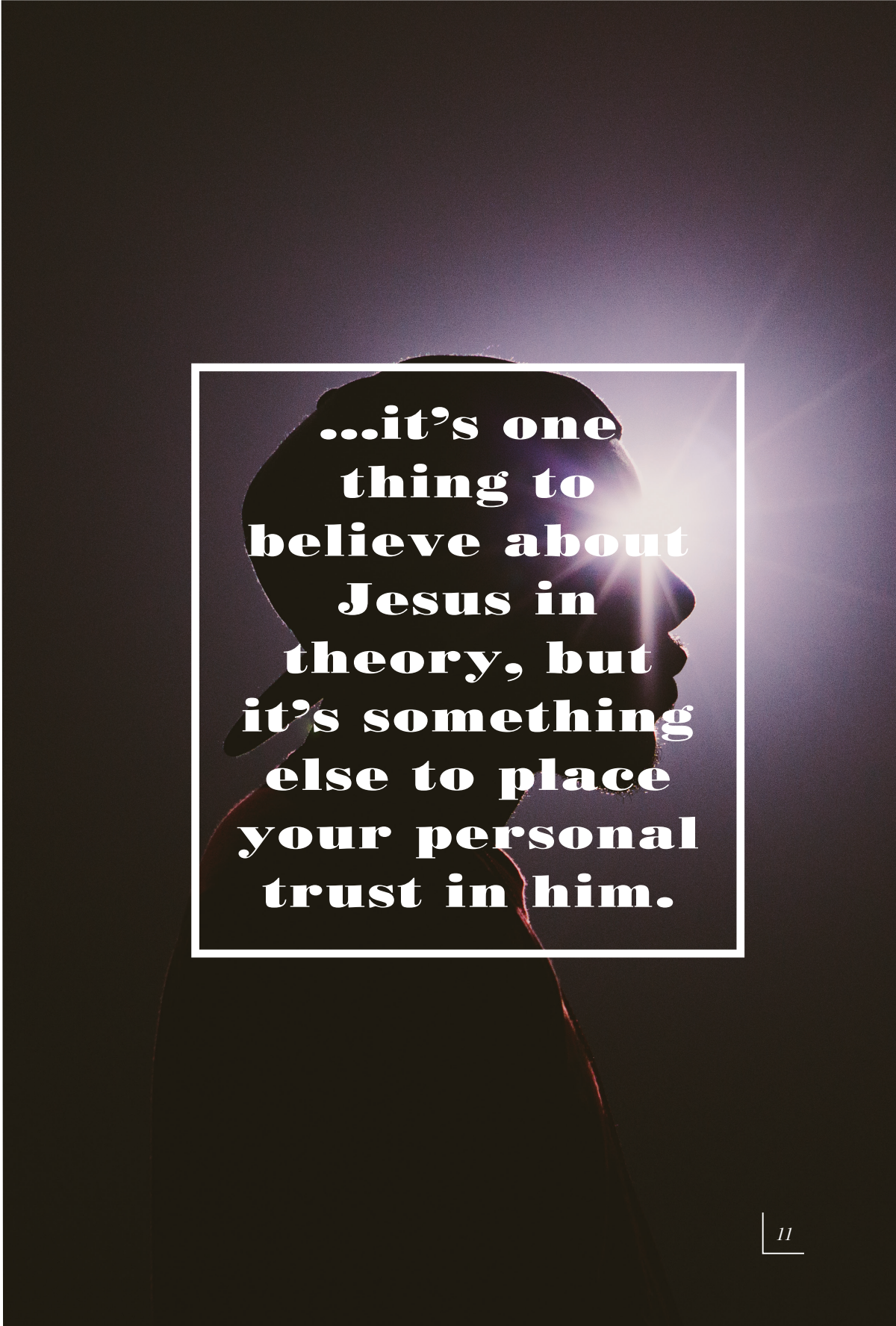
Then he asked, "Would someone like to volunteer?"

Not a single hand went up.

Point being, it's one thing to believe about Jesus in theory, but it's something else to place your personal trust in him.

Take Time To Reflect

As you think about your life, what makes it challenging for you to place your personal trust or confidence in Jesus?


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The 3 Layers Of Belief

From what I have learned studying the Bible's definition of believing, there are three "layers."

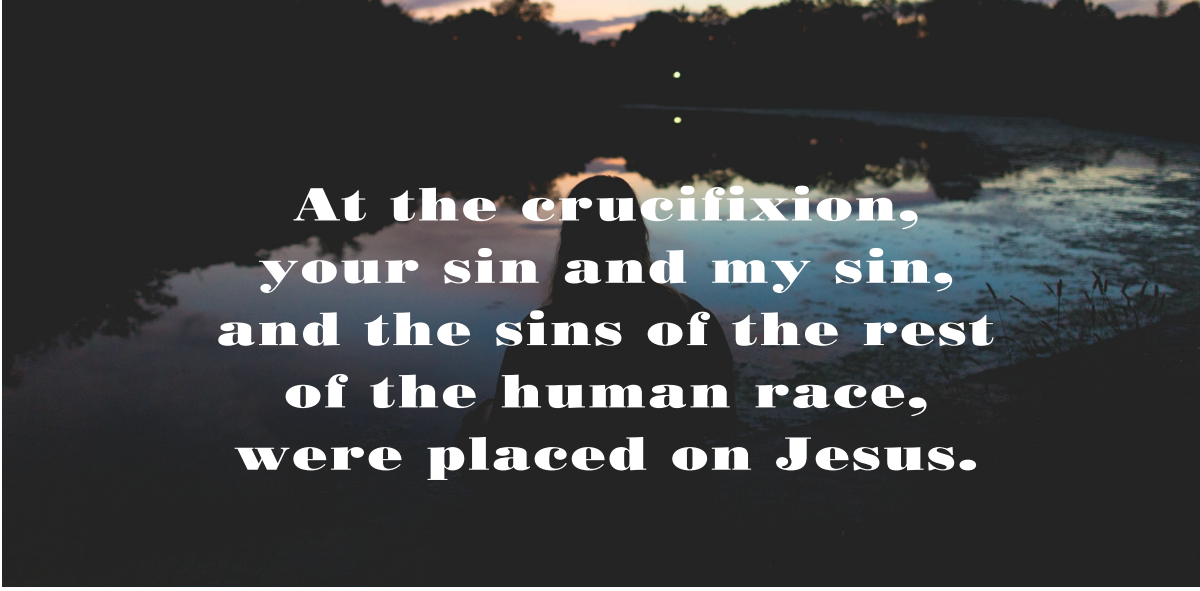
1. The Message

First, there's the message itself. You can't believe until there's *something* to believe. In God's way of looking at it, the message goes like this: You and I, along with the rest of the human race, are sinners. Sin encompasses wrong attitudes, acts, and all kinds of violations and shortcomings of God's perfect will for our lives. Sin separates us from God, and whether we have a few sins or a huge mountain-high pile of them, we need a Savior. We can never save ourselves, because even if we could manage to be perfect for the rest of our lives (which we can't), how could we ever pay for the sins we've already committed?

Look at how the Bible says it in these two verses:

As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one."
Romans 3:10 (NLT)

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.
Romans 3:23 (NLT)



God knew we were in an impossible place, so he designed a wonderful plan. Jesus, God's Son, would be born into our world as a human (God and human at the same time), he would live the perfect life we could never live, and then he would be willing to pay the penalty for our sins by dying the most horrific death known to mankind—crucifixion. At the crucifixion, your sin and my sin, and the sins of the rest of the human race, were placed on Jesus.

Take a look at the way Isaiah wrote it:

But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.
He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.
All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the Lord laid on him
the sins of us all.
Isaiah 53:5-6 (NLT)

It's the most amazing story in history—God loved us so much that he came into our world to take our punishment on himself.

Three days after Jesus died, the Scriptures tell us he came back to life, rising from his own grave, proving that he was everything he said he was. Think about this: When you prayed to receive him, the risen, living Son of God personally heard *your* prayer.



2. Agreeing With The Message

The second part of believing is agreeing with the message. Lots of people hear the message but question it, doubt it, or reject it completely. But you've chosen a different path. You've said, "I have heard the message and I agree that it's true. I wasn't there. I didn't see it happen. I have never seen Jesus with my physical eyes. But I agree with what the Bible says about him."

By the way, that puts you in line for a special blessing. After Jesus came back to life and appeared to his followers, one of them, Thomas, missed out on seeing him. When the others tried to tell him the good news, he refused to believe, insisting that unless he could see and touch Jesus' wounds, he would not believe. Fortunately for Thomas, Jesus gave him that opportunity. But you should really like what Jesus told him after that. Take a look:

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me." John 20:29 (NLT)

Hey, that's you and me!



3. Placing Your Trust In Jesus

The third layer of believing is the most important. It's simply placing your personal trust in Jesus to save your soul. It's falling into his arms, trusting him to forgive you of your sins and bring you into God's family.

Listen to the prayer of the thief who died on the cross next to Jesus, and I think you'll feel what we're talking about:

"...We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:41-43 (NLT)

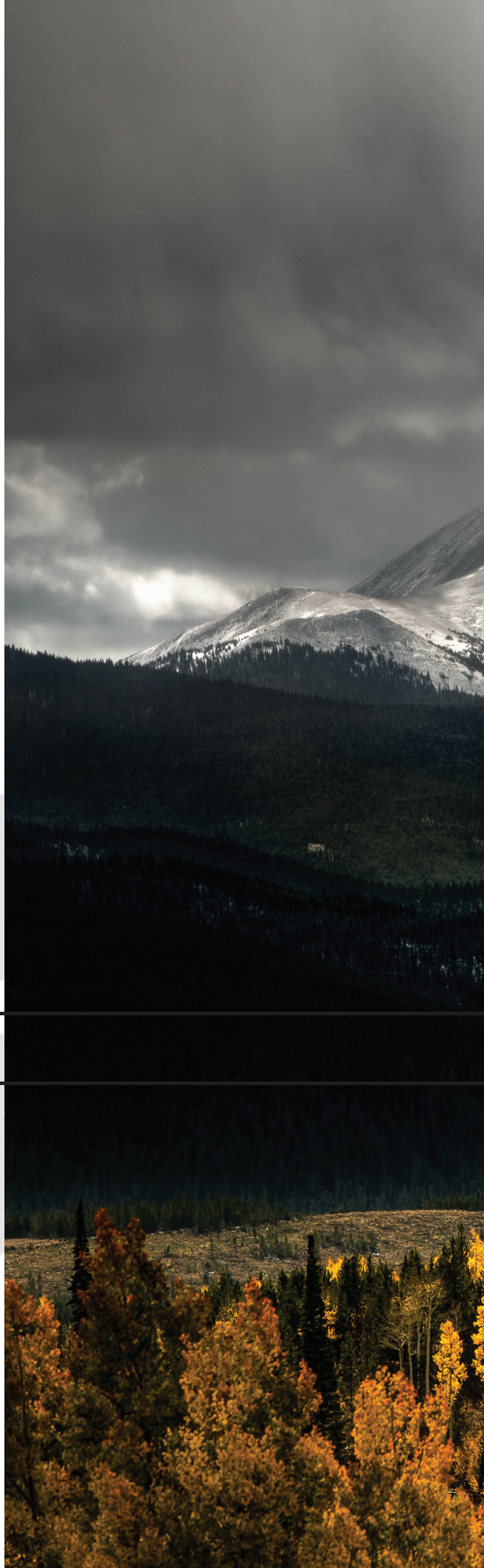
Take Time To Reflect

As you look at the three layers of belief, where do you currently see yourself? Where do you need God's help?


It's falling into his arms, trusting him to forgive you of your sins and bring you into God's family.

03

Chapter Three





Too Good To Be True?



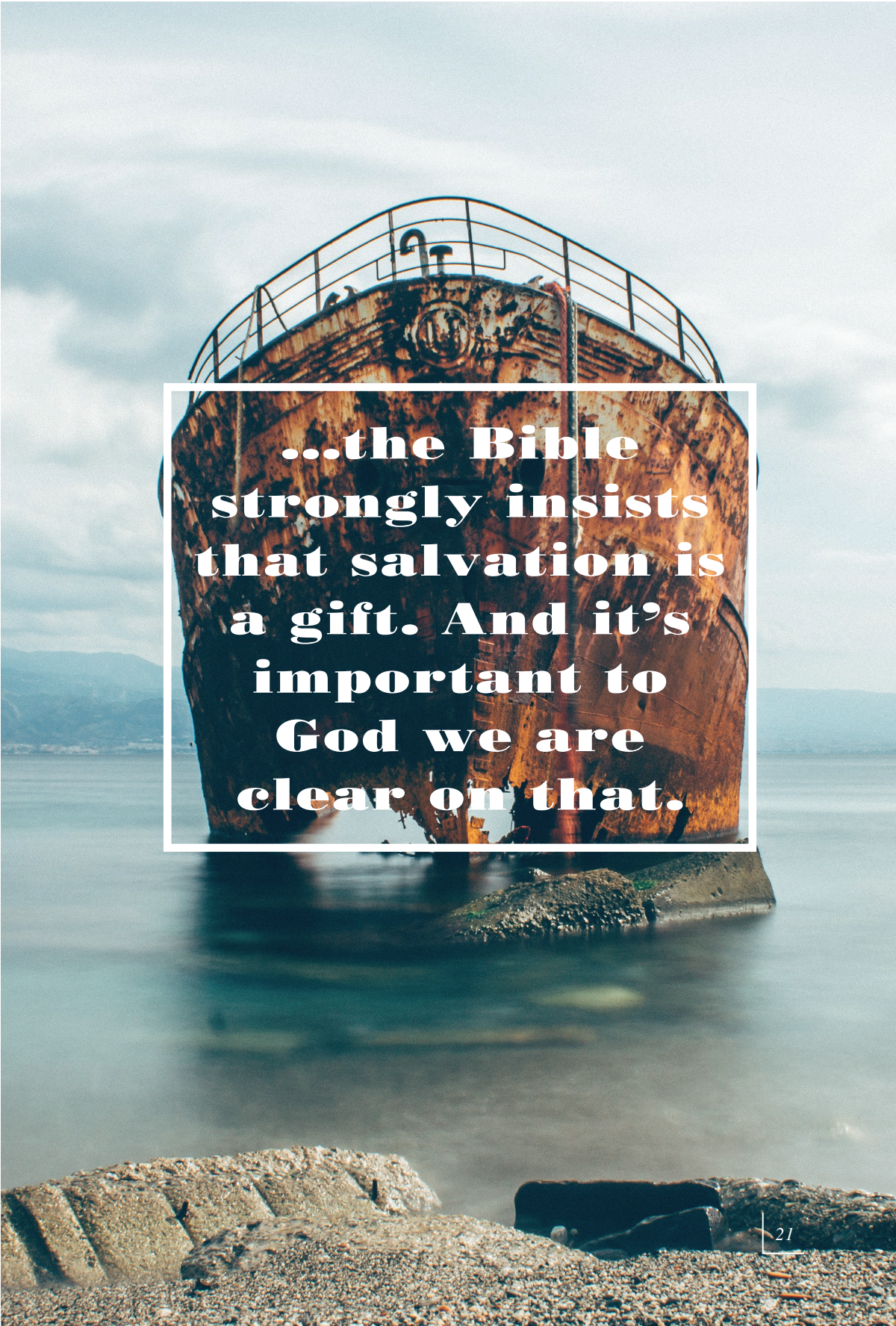
"Isn't there something else I have to do?"

This is a natural question to ask—it's just human nature to believe that nothing of value is truly free.

How then, could acquiring the most priceless possession in the universe be so simple? As we read earlier in Ephesians 2:8-9, the Bible strongly insists that salvation is a *gift*. And it's important to God we are clear on that. Remember, the price he had to pay was the horrific death of his only Son. If there were something we could have done to buy our salvation, such a sacrifice would never have been necessary.

Think about it this way:
What good deed or religious act could we carry out that would be needed in addition to Jesus' perfect sacrifice?

When Jesus came to the end of his sufferings on the cross, he cried out, "It is finished." He meant that the price for our sins had been paid in full. There's nothing we can do to earn, deserve, or buy salvation. There's only one way to receive a true gift—you reach out and accept it.


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"What about 'repenting'?"

If you've ever read the Bible or listened to sermons, chances are you've heard the word "repent." And you may be wondering, "Is this something I should do?" Well, let's talk about what it means.

Often, the word repentance is associated with feelings of sadness or pain for the wrong things we've done or telling God we're sorry. (And I think any believer who understands the price Jesus paid for our sins certainly wants to do that.) But repentance involves more.

Our English word "repent" comes from two Greek words that are jammed together, literally meaning "changed thinking."

Think about this Scripture for a minute:

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Acts 20:21 (NIV)

Paul is telling us his own story. Everywhere he went, regardless of who he met, he had two instructions—that people change their thinking about God and put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's talk about what having a "change in thinking" means. Remember what Isaiah said? He said every one of us has decided to go our own way (which means living as if we didn't really need God) because we thought our own way was good enough. But the message we talked about earlier tells us we can't handle life by ourselves. We can't figure things

out on our own. Worst of all, our sins threaten to destroy us.

We need God to take charge of our lives. Repentance means owning up to the reality that we are on the wrong track, turning from our old way of thinking (changing our minds), and embracing Jesus as our Lord and King.

Have you had such a turning point? If not, this is the perfect time. Admit to God that your life has been on the wrong road. Put your faith in Jesus, trusting him to forgive you and make you God's child. Tell him that, by his grace, you want a new start. Ask him to give you the strength to follow Jesus. Ask him to show you how to leave the past behind so you can please him by the way you live your life from now on.

Repentance means owning up to the reality that we are on the wrong track, turning from our old way of thinking (changing our minds), and embracing Jesus as our Lord and King.



"I'm excited about having Jesus in my life, but I know I can't be perfect."

The last part of that statement is probably much more true than either you or I realize. Perfect means doing everything right—*nothing* wrong—and having the truest of motivations for all of our actions.

The fact is, we are all light years away from perfection.

But at the moment you accepted Jesus, God moved inside you. As you now worship, pray, and read your Bible, God will help you grow and learn how to please him.

Certainly there are going to be times, though, when you and I will let him down miserably. Is it all over at that point? Does he rescind his free gift? Hardly.

First of all, think about what Scripture says:

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)



In the book of 1 John, the Bible even tells us what to do when we sin:

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 1 John 1:8-9 (NLT)

In one of the most beautiful verses in Scripture, we are assured:

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. 1 John 2:1-2 (NLT)

Take Time To Reflect

Think about an area in your life where you need to repent (change your thinking). What is the first step you need to take?



"Can I ever lose my relationship with God?"

This is another big question. Suppose I sin once too often—does that mean I am not saved anymore? Although Christians have argued about this through the ages, to me it's very clear. It all comes down to one simple truth:

When you accept Jesus, you become God's child. In Jesus' words, you are born again, or born from above. You are adopted into his family.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. John 1:12-13 (NLT)

God sent him (Jesus) *to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. Galatians 4:5 (NLT)*

Think about the relationship between a parent and their child. Even when the child does wrong, their parent doesn't disown them. Actually, from what we know of DNA today, it would be impossible. We've all heard of children who have broken their parents' hearts with long spells of


When you accept Jesus, you become God's child... You are adopted into his family.

rebellion, yet their parents loved and prayed for them throughout that time and longed to restore the relationship.

Jesus wants us to understand that God is a much better parent than those of us who are earthly parents. Listen to what Jesus said on one occasion:

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"
Matthew 7:11-12 (NIV)

God is such a wonderful Father that compared to him, I, as a dad, am totally inferior. And yet, it is in my nature to forgive and restore my children. So how much more is it the inclination of our Heavenly Father to do so?

Take a look at the following story that Jesus told, and I think you'll get an even clearer picture of what he's saying to us.



To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

"A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

"When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."'

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'

"But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began."

Luke 15:11-24 (NLT)


God's
children
always have a
home and a
Father to
come back to.

Now, don't get the wrong idea. Even though God doesn't reject us from his family, if we live lives of rebellion like this kid after we have received Jesus as our Savior, sin still has consequences. The Bible tells us we will reap the harvest of the seeds we plant. But that doesn't mean we will have to pay the price for our sins; Jesus did that on the cross. The only way you and I could pay the actual penalty for our sins is to spend an eternity in hell. What we're talking about here is not paying for sin but dealing with the painful consequences of sin.

Think about the kid in our story. Although he experienced forgiveness from his dad, he dealt with a ton of unpleasant consequences from the choices he made during his rebellion. He came home humbled, broken, and tattered, but as Jesus' story tells us, God's children always have a home and a Father to come back to.

One final thing should be pointed out here: If you and I continue in deep sin patterns, it's actually God's mercy to let us feel the pain from those choices. Someone has said that pain is God's megaphone. He loves us way too much to let us continue in a life we weren't designed to live. See how the Bible says it:

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. Hebrews 12:10-11 (NLT)

Take Time To Reflect

Through Jesus, nothing you do can change your status as God's child. How does this concept affect the way you view your life and your sin?



"Is it possible I've been too 'bad' for God to save?"

This question is too important and sensitive for any answer I might give, so I'll just let Scripture speak for itself:

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."
John 3:14-15 (NIV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:16-18 (NIV)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.
2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.
1 Timothy 1:15-16 (NLT)

Maybe this is a good time to stop and think about something: If you feel like the worst sinner you know, believe it or not, that's a good thing. The reality is, the closer we get to God, the more we're going to feel our sinfulness. See, as long as we're comparing ourselves to other people, we can come off looking all right—but when we get an idea of who God is in all of his perfection, we realize just how short we come up.

Here's the deal: If you are concerned that your sins are too bad, you are exactly the person God can help.

I want to show you an amazing verse that had a huge impact on me when I was young and struggling with some of these feelings in my life:

However, to the one who does not work (the one who doesn't depend on their own good works) *but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.*
Romans 4:5 (NIV)

As the great preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote a hundred years ago, "If you feel wicked, then you are just the one the Lord can help, because He is the one who justifies the wicked."

What an awesome Savior we have!



"How can I know for sure God has forgiven me?"

The moment you chose to believe in Jesus and prayed for him to become your Savior, God moved inside you. And to be sure, that will make a difference.

But everything won't happen overnight. It is a new relationship. In fact, the early days of being a Christian are characterized as being a "baby in Christ." Babies grow and mature, and the same thing will happen with you. As you grow, you will begin to notice evidence that a change has happened in your life.

But here's the big thing: When God wants to assure you of your relationship with him, he points you to two places:

1. His Word.
2. God's Spirit living in you.

As you grow, you will begin to notice evidence that a change has happened in your life.

Check these verses out:

And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.
1 John 5:11-13 (NLT)

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
John 20:31 (NIV)

And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."
Galatians 4:6 (NLT)

That last one is really special. It's saying that when you receive Jesus, the Holy Spirit of God comes to live inside you and makes it a natural thing to call God your Father.

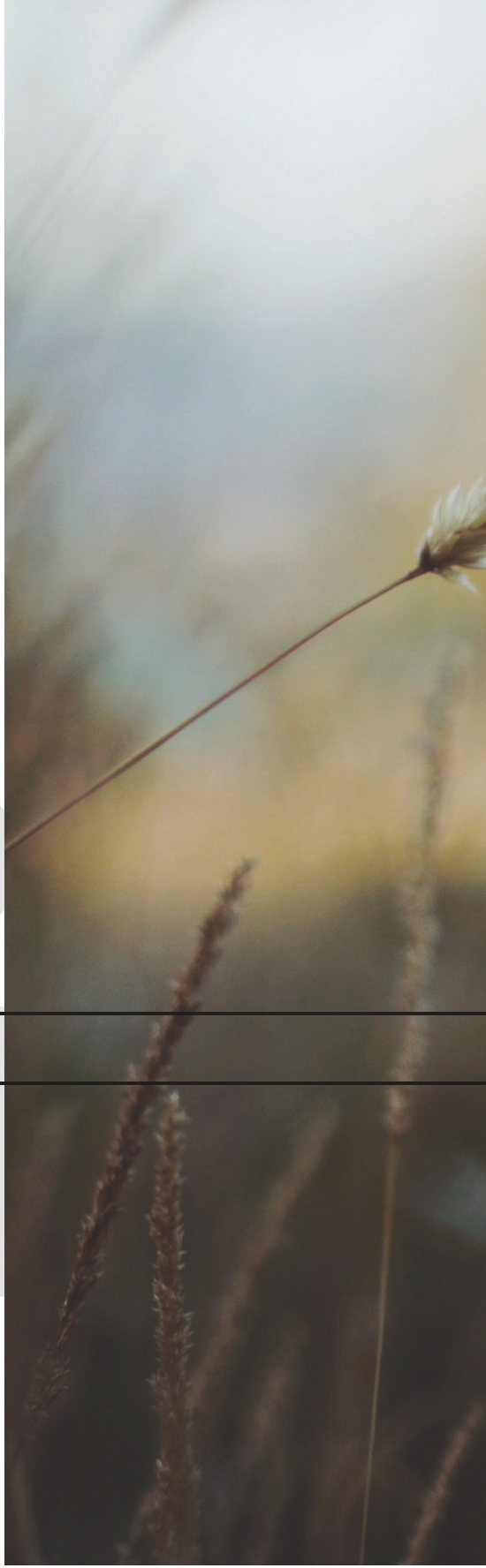
See the word "Abba"? It's an Aramaic word that has been a challenge to Bible translators through the years. The closest thing we have to it in English is "Daddy" or "Dear Papa." Some Bible scholars worried that it would be too informal to address God in such a way, so they left the word in the Aramaic. The truth is, it's not about the title we choose to address God with. "Heavenly Father" is fine. It's more about the spirit of tenderness and the sense of acceptance we feel when we talk with him. It's one of the most powerful indicators that we have truly become God's child.

Take Time To Reflect

Do you see yourself as too "bad" for God to save? How does understanding that you're in a new relationship with God change how you view your past and present?

04

Chapter Four





So, What Now?



"Now that I've received Jesus as my Savior, what's next?"

Here are four steps that will help you grow in your new faith and strengthen your assurance that God has made you a new person.

Please remember that none of these things I'm about to share with you make you a child of God. You were saved when, by faith, you accepted God's gift of salvation. The following four steps are actions you take in response because of the gift Jesus has given you.

1. Go public with your faith.

From the very beginning of the church, nearly 2,000 years ago, Christ followers have chosen to be baptized. Simply put, baptism means being placed under water, then being raised out of it. On one hand, it seems pretty strange that God would want us to go through something like that, but as we look at what the Bible says, it makes perfect sense.

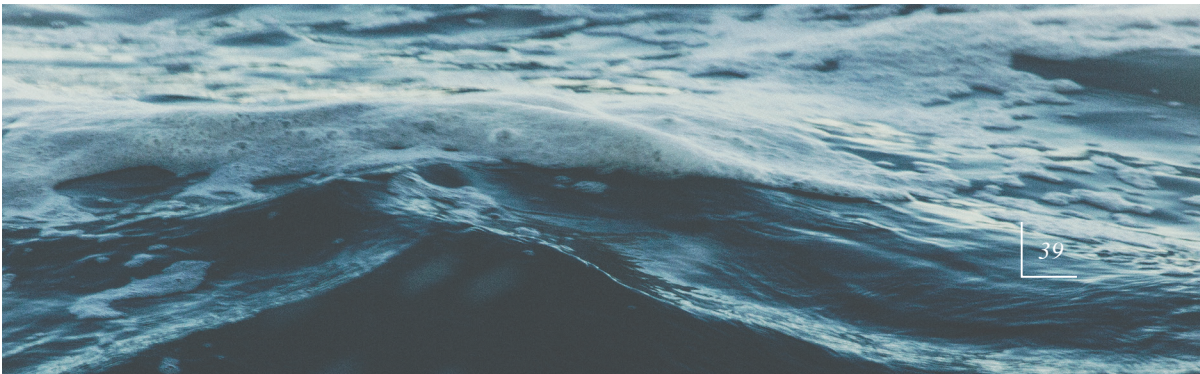
When you are baptized, you are personally demonstrating a picture of the good news you believed when you prayed to receive Jesus. Listen to how Paul describes this good news:

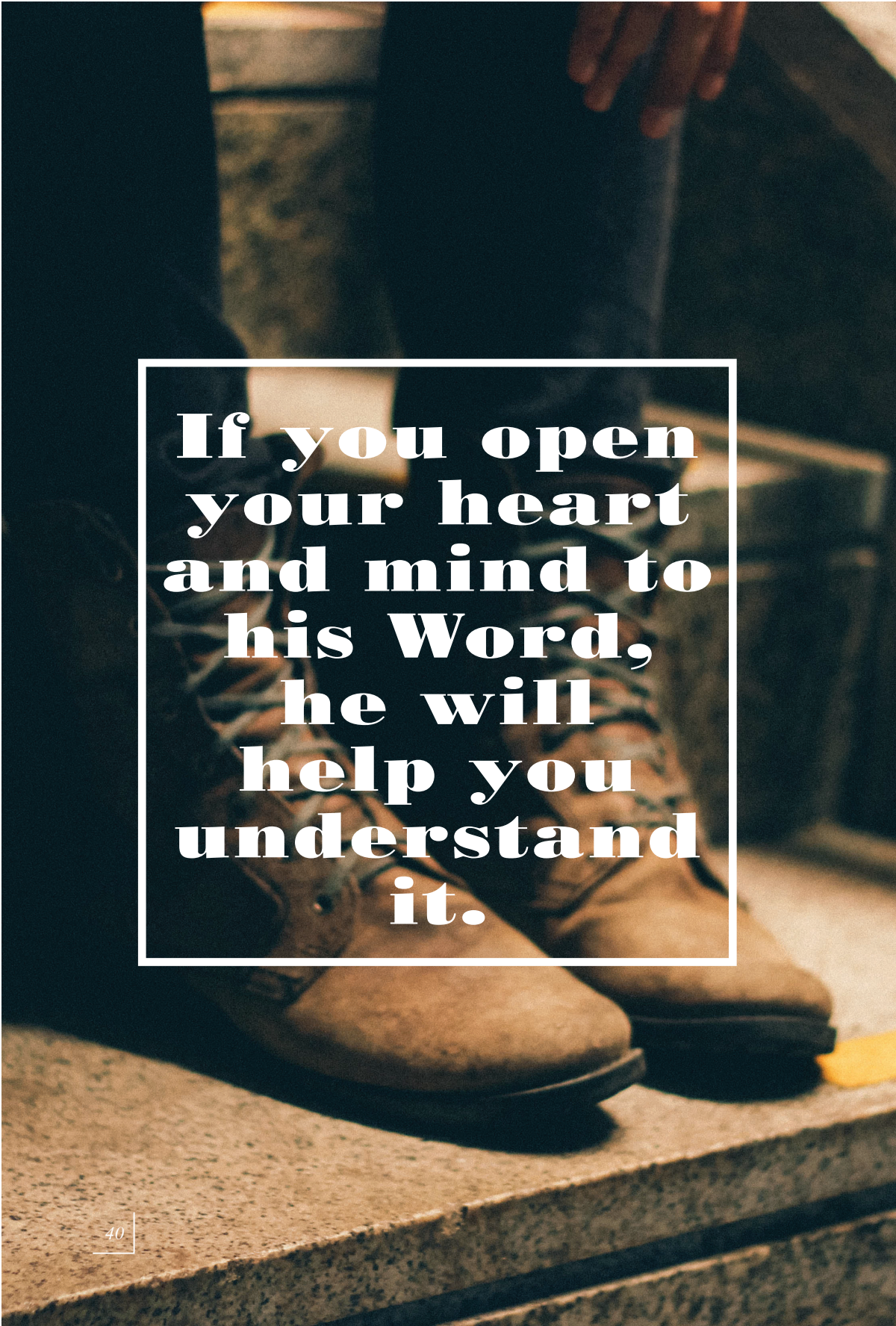
...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...
1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NIV)

When you experience baptism, you are going through the motions of death, burial, and resurrection. It is your way of letting everyone know that you have identified yourself with the one who died for you and was raised from the grave. When you are baptized, it is very clear who you follow. Religious leaders have come and gone, but only one person died for our sins and rose from his grave. In your baptism, you are giving him all the credit for your salvation.

I'll say it one more time: Baptism doesn't save you. It's not even part of what saves you. You became God's child when you believed God's message and invited Jesus to become your Savior. Baptism is simply your way of publicly taking a stand for Jesus.

When you are baptized, you are personally demonstrating a picture of the good news you believed when you prayed to receive Jesus.




If you open your heart and mind to his Word, he will help you understand it.

2. Spend time every day in a living book.

Have you ever wished you could have an interview with God? An experience where you could ask him the deepest questions about life and get answers? God has made a way for us to get those answers—they're in a book we call the Bible. Many people are intimidated to read the Bible because they fear they'll come across things they can't understand. But don't let that stop you.

Start with the stories of Jesus. There are four of them: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are the first four books of the New Testament. To be sure, you'll find some things that you won't understand at first, but much of what you read will become very meaningful to you. And God makes you a promise: If you open your heart and mind to his Word, he will help you understand it.

Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them."
Mark 4:24-25 (NLT)

(Note: When Jesus spoke these words, the Bible was not yet written, and the Word of God was spoken. Today, we have the written Word, but the same principle Jesus talked about still applies.)





3. Talk to God.

Could you walk into the White House today and have a conversation with the president? OK, scale it back—how about the governor? What about the mayor? If the answer to all of the above is an emphatic no, don't let it bother you. You have permission to enter the very presence of God and talk with the Creator of the universe anytime! That's what prayer is. You can tell him anything. Tell him about your fears, your pain, your hopes... whatever is on your mind. And you can ask him for whatever you need. Don't ever feel like you're troubling him—he has asked you to come.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

You have permission to enter the very presence of God and talk with the Creator of the universe anytime!

Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall. Psalm 55:22 (NLT)

Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Colossians 4:2 (NLT)

4. Worship, learn, and experience community with other Christ followers in a Bible-teaching church.

Following Jesus is a life filled with joy, but it's also an uphill journey. We need the help and encouragement that comes from worshipping, listening to teaching, and sharing life with others who are on the same path. This is what the church was always meant to be about.

If you're in the Wichita area, we'd love to invite you to take your spiritual journey with us. If you're outside the area, I'd like to encourage you to find a church that believes and teaches the messages I've addressed in these pages. If our church office can be of any assistance in this, please let us know.

Take Time To Reflect

As you think through all you have read in this book, what is the next step God is leading you to take?

