



RBYA

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

EMBRACING TRANSFORMATION
IN CHRIST

WELCOME!

Welcome to a pivotal stage in your spiritual journey. As you read this introduction, you may find yourself confused as to what salvation really is, what it entails, and what comes of it. These are all very good questions to ask, and it is essential that you ask them. This booklet aims to answer these questions to a certain point, but more importantly to direct you to your local church leaders. At the end of the day, God has placed you in your specific local church, and it is not our intention to take the place of the local church in this regard. However, we still want you to benefit as much as possible from these events and that is why we have accumulated a list of topics that we considered important for you to know.

The booklet focuses on foundational biblical concepts, inviting you to meditate deeply on each one, understanding its significance in your spiritual walk. We encourage the use of a physical Bible to help deepen focus and minimize digital distraction, creating a more immersive encounter with God's Word. Approach each lesson as if you are hearing it for the first time. Let every word challenge and change you. Don't just ask God to apply His Word in your life; take each sentence and actively try to apply it to yourself. Remember, there are no shortcuts in the pursuit of holiness and a deeper relationship with God. This plan is a simple step in that lifelong journey of faith and dependence on God. Take time to write down any questions, note what stands out to you, and record what you feel like God may be trying to tell you. This practice of reflection will help deepen your understanding and connection with Him.

1 Understanding the Person and Work of Christ

John 8:48-59, Revelation 1:4-8

Who is this Christ that is so often spoken of, why is He important, and why is He worthy of worship? Well, first and foremost, Jesus Christ is important and worthy of worship because He is God! Throughout His ministry on this earth, Christ declares not only to be sent by the Father but to be ONE with the Father. One example is in John 8, where we see a discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees. In this discussion, Jesus says this phrase, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” This was not a mispronunciation, but Christ was referring to Himself using the name that God gave to the Jews, which was “I AM that I AM.” By saying this, Jesus Christ was declaring openly and clearly that He is God. However, in Revelation 1, John captures the totality of who Christ is. He is the faithful witness. Christ is the one of whom the prophets wrote in the Old Testament, the one who fulfills the prophecies of old, the one who accomplished that which He came to do. He is the firstborn from the dead who was raised through the power of God and ascended to the Father’s side, where he intercedes before the Father on our behalf. He is the ruler of kings on Earth, showing that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. These attributes can be encompassed in three categories. Christ is our prophet, priest, and king!

However, to understand who Christ is, we must also look at what He has done. Based on Revelation 1, we see that He loved us, continues to love us, and will love us forever! Everything that God has done for us is out of His love for us, and it is this love that motivated him to free us from our sins by His blood. Christ died on our behalf, paying the debt that we owed, therefore freeing us from

our sins, which we'll cover in a later section! However, not only did Christ free us from our sins, but He made us a kingdom and priests to God! By freeing us from our sins, Christ's death also brought us into the Kingdom of God, making us sons and daughters of the living God! Who is this Christ? He is everything—the exalted one through whom and for whom things were created. He is the one who left His throne to come to this earth for sinners, as the prophets declared hundreds of years before. He is the one who loves you with endless and immovable love. He is God, and He is worthy of praise, honor, and glory!

APPLY

1. How does recognizing Jesus as both God and Savior impact your understanding of His role in your life? Reflect on the personal significance of Jesus' divinity and His sacrificial love for you.
2. What does being part of the 'kingdom of priests' mean for your daily interactions and decisions? Contemplate how your identity as a member of Christ's kingdom influences your everyday life and choices.
3. In light of Christ's sacrificial love and His act of making us a kingdom and priests to God, what changes can you make to live more fully as a child of God, embracing your identity in His Kingdom? Identify practical ways in which you can embody your role as a part of God's kingdom, living out the privileges and responsibilities of this divine relationship.

2 What Is Salvation?

Romans 6:4, Colossians 3, Galatians 5:22-24

Salvation is a complete transformation, vividly illustrated by baptism, as described in Romans 6:4. In this act, symbolic of Christ's death and resurrection, we acknowledge our old self dying and a new self, alive in God, emerging. This transition is not just symbolic but as real as Christ's sacrifice—a literal passing from death to life. Dying with Christ means turning away from sin, liberated not by our deeds but by Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. Embracing this new life, as Galatians 2:20 tells us, is about living through faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. It's a life transformed by the resurrection's redemptive power, not by adherence to commandments but by God's love.

This new life calls for a rejection of the old self, as urged in Colossians 3, and a daily effort to discard our sinful nature. It's about feeling a strong hatred for sin, which is a sign of the Holy Spirit at work within us. Yet, salvation is equally about embracing the new self, marked by the fruit of the Spirit. One fruit with many qualities like love, joy, and peace that reflect the Spirit's transformative work in us. This change, as Galatians 5:22-24 highlights, is not just about feelings; it's a fundamental shift in our being. Our daily lives, thoughts, and actions should align with this new identity in Christ. Reflect on being 'alive to God' and how this manifests in practical ways. Challenge yourself to live as a new creation, consciously letting go of the old and nurturing the new, guided by the Holy Spirit's ongoing work within.

APPLY

1. Considering the reality of 'dying with Christ' means turning away from sin, how does this challenge your current lifestyle, especially in areas where you struggle with sin? Reflect on how embracing Christ's sacrifice impacts your daily life and personal battles with sin.
2. Given that living as a new creation involves demonstrating the 'fruit of the Spirit', in what specific ways can you manifest qualities like love, joy, and peace in your daily interactions? Think about practical actions and behaviors that show the transformative work of the Spirit in your life, reflecting your new identity in Christ.
3. Recognizing that embracing the new self requires letting go of the old, what aspects of your 'old self' are you still holding onto, and how can you actively work to surrender these to live fully 'alive to God'? Identify specific habits or attitudes from your previous way of life that need to be given up for a deeper spiritual transformation.

3 Justification

Romans 3:23-24

The doctrine of justification is a central theme in Christian theology that addresses the question of how sinful human beings can be made righteous before a Holy God. Justification is typically known as the first step of salvation, and it takes place at the moment when the believer places their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. At its core, justification is an act of God's grace where He declares a sinner righteous based on faith in the person and work of Christ. This doctrine is deeply rooted in the biblical understanding of salvation, emphasizing that humans are incapable of earning righteousness through their own works. The Apostle Paul, particularly in his letters to the Romans and Galatians, expounds on the doctrine of justification by faith. Romans 3:23-24 sheds light on the universality of sin and the gracious nature of justification, emphasizing that redemption is not based on human merit but is a free gift of God through the work of Christ.

Every human is born with a sinful nature, which means that from birth we are sinful and destined for eternal punishment. Yet this is the beauty of the gospel; while Christ was on the cross, our punishment and debt was placed on Him. He bore our sins and the punishment necessary, and He was crushed under the wrath of God against sin. Christ's rising on the third day is proof that Christ truly conquered sin and death. By believing in Christ, His perfect righteousness is placed on us. Because of this, when the Father looks at us, He sees not our sinful state but the righteousness of Christ. However, this does not mean that we are able to live as we please. We are

new creations in Christ, and He will make sure that we are conformed to His image, but we'll save that for the next section!

APPLY

1. How does understanding justification as a free gift of God, not based on human merit, change your perspective on grace and your own efforts to earn salvation? Reflect on the impact of realizing that righteousness comes solely through faith in Christ, not through personal deeds.
2. Considering that through justification, God sees us as righteous because of Christ's righteousness, how does this truth influence your self-perception and your relationship with God? Think about the profound shift in identity that justification brings and how this new understanding of being seen as righteous in Christ affects your daily walk with God.
3. In light of being a new creation in Christ and the transformative power of justification, how might this doctrine encourage you to live a life that reflects Christ's image? Contemplate the practical implications of justification in your life, especially how it should inspire you to conform more to the likeness of Christ.

4 Sanctification

Romans 6:19, 2 Corinthians 7:1

In Christian theology, the doctrine of sanctification addresses the ongoing process of being made holy or set apart. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, conforming them to the image of Christ and progressively transforming their character to reflect His righteousness. Sanctification is a doctrine that is often mixed with justification in Christian circles. Many believe their ability to live a holy life leads to their right to be declared righteous. They think that if they live a life that is holy enough, then God will be pleased, and they will have “earned” their salvation. Yet, this is not how it works. Sanctification is not a means of our salvation but a result of our salvation. This means that we are not saved through our ability to live holy lives, but rather we live holy lives because we have been saved. At the moment of salvation, a believer becomes a new creation. The person they were, along with their sinful tendencies, has passed away, and they have been given a new heart with new desires. Though we continue to be sinful creatures and will be so until we reach glory, we strive to be holy, just as our Father in Heaven is holy.

So how does sanctification work? Biblical passages, such as Romans 6:19 and 2 Corinthians 7:1, elaborate on the transformative nature of sanctification. The doctrine highlights the believer's active cooperation with the Holy Spirit in pursuing a life of obedience and moral purity. In our daily walk, we strive to be holy and fight our sinful desires, yet through it all, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is not a one-time event or immediate state but an ongoing journey, emphasizing both the

positional sanctification granted at conversion (remember, we are declared “just” when we believe in Christ) and the progressive sanctification worked out in the believer's daily life. It ultimately points to the goal of becoming more like Christ and living a life that honors and glorifies God.

APPLY

1. How does distinguishing sanctification as a result of salvation, rather than a means to it, reshape your understanding of living a holy life? Reflect on the notion that holiness is not about earning salvation, but a response to the salvation already received.
2. Considering that sanctification is an ongoing process empowered by the Holy Spirit, in what areas of your life do you currently see the need for growth and transformation? Identify specific aspects of your character or daily habits where you feel the Holy Spirit's transformative work is especially needed.
3. As sanctification involves both positional sanctification at conversion and progressive sanctification in daily life, how can you actively cooperate with the Holy Spirit in becoming more like Christ? Think about practical steps you can take in your daily walk with God to embrace and encourage the ongoing process of sanctification in your life

5 Glorification

1 John 3:2-3

The doctrine of glorification is a profound aspect of Christian theology that speaks to the future transformation and ultimate perfection of believers. In 1 John, the Apostle John communicates the future-oriented nature of glorification, assuring believers that they will undergo a radical transformation into the likeness of Christ when He returns. This hope that we have through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit is one of the driving forces of the believer. The Christian life is a difficult road to walk; however, through it all, we look towards the hope that awaits. Our future glorification is part of this hope. One day, when either Christ returns or calls us home, we will be transformed into our glorified bodies. We will be free of sin and its corruption, and we will spend eternity with our Lord and Savior, who is Christ.

The hope of seeing Christ face-to-face, and becoming like Him, serves as a powerful motivation for believers to pursue holiness and moral purity in the present. The doctrine of glorification encourages believers to live in anticipation of the day when they will be fully conformed to the image of Christ, experiencing the fullness of God's transformative and glorifying work where there will no longer be pain, sin, or suffering.

APPLY

1. How does the promise of future glorification shape your perspective on the struggles and challenges you face in your current Christian walk? Reflect on how the hope of transformation and perfection in Christ influences your resilience and perspective in facing life's difficulties.
2. In what ways can the hope of seeing Christ face-to-face and becoming like Him motivate you to pursue holiness and moral purity today? Consider how the anticipation of glorification can inspire and energize your daily efforts toward living a life that honors God.
3. How does the doctrine of glorification influence your view of earthly struggles, particularly regarding pain, sin, and suffering? Think about how the assurance of an ultimate, glorious state with Christ can provide comfort and perspective in your current experiences of hardship

6 Legalism, License, or Liberty?

Galatians 5:13

Legalism, a carryover from Old Testament law, wrongly suggests that strict adherence to rules can earn salvation, placing faith in one's actions rather than in Christ. This mindset, condemned in Matthew 7:21-23, falsely assures salvation through deeds. However, the grace of Christ does not grant a license to sin; it calls for serving in love, as emphasized in Galatians 5:13. In Christ, we are liberated, not to be lawless but to love lawfully. Liberty in Christ invites us to an easy yoke and light burdens, as described in Matthew 11:28-30, where obedience springs from love. This liberty is about serving God from the heart, being inspired by His sacrificial love, and living out our faith through genuine love for Him and others. Walking in spirit involves daily choosing to follow Jesus, approaching spiritual growth with patience, and consistently engaging in faith, not as a convenience but as a committed way of life.

The responsibility for us is to rethink our relationship with Scripture. Rather than viewing it as a checklist, we should see it as a life-giving encounter, a step closer to God, and a medium to foster a treasured relationship with Him. If reading the Bible feels burdensome, it's time to reconsider our perception of Jesus. He is not just a historical figure or a helper in need, but the living Son of God, inviting us into a dynamic, personal relationship. The joy of discovering more about Jesus should motivate us to engage with the Bible, not out of obligation but from a desire to deepen our understanding and connection with Him. Let the liberty in Christ inspire us to approach Scripture with eagerness and joy, seeking to know Him more intimately.

APPLY

1. How can you distinguish between legalistic adherence to rules and living a life of love and liberty in Christ, as described in Galatians 5:13 and Matthew 11:28-30? Reflect on how your daily actions and attitudes align with the concept of serving God and others out of love rather than obligation.
2. In what ways can you reshape your approach to Scripture to view it as a life-giving encounter with God rather than a checklist? Consider how you can change your perspective and practice of reading the Bible to foster a deeper, more personal relationship with Christ.
3. How does the idea of liberty in Christ change your perception of Jesus and motivate you to engage with the Bible with eagerness and joy? Think about how this newfound freedom and understanding of Jesus' role can inspire a more passionate and committed engagement with Scripture.

7 Be Not Conformed to this World!

Romans 12:1-2

Do not be conformed to this world. This is a command given to all Christians, but what does it mean, and how is it done? Paul writes this section after spending the previous eleven chapters explaining to the church in Rome how believers have received the righteousness of God through Christ (justification). After explaining what that means, he changes his tone to say that since you, the believer, have been declared righteous in Christ, live like it. Paul is saying that since you are made righteous through Christ and since you are a new creation, you must not live, behave, or act like the world. You are a new person, which means you have been given a new character. However, as we mentioned, this new lifestyle is not a means of salvation but a result of your salvation! What does that mean? It means that living a life that is not conformed to this world, striving for holiness, and striving to follow God's commands does not earn salvation. We strive for holiness and righteousness **BECAUSE** we are saved! One of the marks of a regenerated life is a desire for holiness and a desire to be conformed to Christ!

How is this done? Paul gives us the answer, which is: by renewing our minds! This means that to live a life that is not conformed to the world, we must renew our minds. This is a daily renewal; it is not a one-time event. This is a daily process that is done primarily through reading and meditating on God's word and by praying and spending time with God. Both aspects are equally important! We must be willing to discipline ourselves and to dive into God's word, but we also need to recognize that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the wisdom to not only understand

His Word, but to live it out. What we see presented here is an example of sanctification. We have been Justified in Christ, or declared just, as we read earlier, and now we are being sanctified, made like Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we seek to be conformed to Christ rather than to the world, and this can only be done through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit.

APPLY

1. In what specific ways can you actively work on renewing your mind daily to avoid conforming to the world, as Paul advises in his letter to the Romans? Reflect on practical steps you can take each day to align your thoughts and actions more closely with God's word and character.
2. How does understanding that striving for holiness is a result of salvation, not a means to it, influence your approach to living a righteous life? Consider how this perspective shift affects your motivation and approach to pursuing holiness and righteousness in your daily life.
3. Given that sanctification is a process aided by the Holy Spirit, how can you more consciously rely on the Spirit's guidance to be conformed to Christ rather than to the world? Think about ways you can be more open to and dependent on the Holy Spirit's work in transforming you to reflect Christ's image more accurately.

8 What is the Church?

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

The term “Church” is a term we often use and throw around, which can lead to confusion regarding what it means. It is a term that is used in the New Testament to refer to the people of God. Therefore, since “Church” refers to the people of God, it means that it is not a physical location but rather a spiritual people. We often say that we are going to church on Sunday, but what we are really saying is that we are going to the gathering of the Church. The Church can meet anywhere, as it is the people that make up the Church, not the building in which they meet. The people of God are also typically called by another name, which is “the Body of Christ.” This not only shows that they are the people of Christ but is also used as an analogy to show how the Church functions. As a body is made up of many members, or parts, so too is the body of Christ made of many members. Each member serves a different purpose or function; however, they all come together to carry out the will of God. As is seen in 1 Corinthians 12, the body functions as one unit, without division, caring for one another. If a member suffers, the entire body suffers, just as when a member rejoices, the entire body rejoices. We are united not under nationality, race, or physical qualities, but we are united in and through Christ.

What is the purpose of the Church? For our purposes, I will categorize the purposes of the Church into three main categories. First of all, the Church is meant for the edification of the saints. The Church is there to fight together, work together, and suffer together as its members progress towards the final goal, which is glory.

We encourage one another, support one another, and push each other to better live for and serve Christ. Second, the Church is meant to carry out what is known as the Sacraments, or Ordinances. This would include Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, which are two commands given by Christ to the Church to further edify or encourage the Church. Finally, the purpose of the Church is to spread the Gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth, make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three categories encompass the purposes and responsibilities of the Church as Christ's representatives in this world.

APPLY

1. How can you actively participate in the Church's role of edifying its members, and in what ways can you contribute to the mutual support and encouragement within the Church community? Reflect on your role within the Church as a member of the Body of Christ and how you can support and uplift others in their faith journey.
2. Considering the Church's responsibility to carry out sacraments and ordinances, how do practices like Baptism and the Lord's Supper deepen your understanding and connection with the Church and Christ? Think about the significance of these sacraments in your spiritual life and how they enhance your relationship with the Church and Christ.
3. In what ways can you contribute to the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel and making disciples, and how does this align with your personal calling as a Christian? Contemplate how you can be involved in the Church's evangelistic and disciple-making efforts, and how these align with your unique gifts and calling.

9 Means of Grace

Acts 2:41-42

The life of a Christian is by no means easy and free of pain, sorrow, and suffering. In fact, it is quite the opposite as Scripture tells us that we will be hated as Christ was hated and that we will be persecuted for our faith. As humans, we still feel the curses of sin in our human bodies. We see how people age, get sick, and eventually die. We see how sin is everywhere around us, polluting all things, and many times is present in our lives. These are things that we cannot escape until we stand before God in glory. Yet Christ did not leave us without ways to encourage us in our walk. Through it all we are empowered by the spirit and motivated through what is typically called the “ordinary means of grace.” These are not means through which we receive grace but rather means given by God for the building and encouragement of His Church.

The four means of grace we will cover are prayer, fellowship, teaching/reading, and fasting. Of the four, three of them are found in Acts 2:41-42 as practices of the early church. They devoted themselves to prayer, meeting together, and listening to the teachings of the Apostles. The fourth means is fasting, which is not included in Acts 2, however is an integral part of the Christian walk. We will have separate sections on each of these; however, it is important to note once more that these means do not earn God’s favor. They are not here for us to show how good we are or how Christian we are, but to build us up. Devoting ourselves to each of these means will lead to our sanctification and will only benefit our Christian walk. These means build up our faith, remind us of our reliance on God, and allow us to encourage our fellow believers.

APPLY

1. How can you incorporate the 'ordinary means of grace' like prayer, fellowship, teaching/reading, and fasting into your daily life to strengthen your faith and reliance on God? Reflect on practical ways to engage regularly with these spiritual practices to deepen your walk with Christ.
2. In what ways can these practices help you endure the challenges, pain, and suffering that come with being a Christian, as described in Scripture? Consider how prayer, fellowship, teaching/reading, and fasting can provide support and encouragement in times of hardship and trials.
3. How can your participation in these means of grace serve not only your personal growth but also encourage and build up fellow believers in the Church? Think about the communal aspect of these practices and how your engagement with them can have a positive impact on others in your church community.

10 Prayer

James 4:5

Do you often find yourself lacking the motivation to pray? Doubting whether God is or is not listening to you? The half-brother of Jesus gives us the remedy to medicate and heal our doubting hearts. James helps us realize God actually wants us to spend time with Him. He is not just saying that he wants to spend time with us because it is his duty to attend to His children's needs. Rather, the Godhead is overflowing with mercy and grace, ready to show each believer. God wants to lavish His grace upon us. Paul explains in Ephesians 1:8–9 *“which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ.”* The same promise written to the saints in Ephesus applies to you and me. The Lord has prepared such truths for you to read and believe with all your heart, mind, and soul. The jealousy of the Lord for the Christian's soul should be the greatest motivation and encouragement to come before him in confidence. We know that we have an ever-present High Priest interceding on our behalf and the Holy Spirit who prays for us when we do not have the words to say to God in our weakest moments (Rom. 8:26,34).

The Believer must realize prayer is more than asking God to do things for them. Rather, it is heavenly communion with God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit the Helper. The natural outflow of communion with the Godhead is Holiness and Joy in their salvation because salvation for the believer does just become freedom from the present life. Salvation becomes a reality for believers where the Christian realizes their eternity has

already begun and they have been saved and secured in Christ alone by the power of the Holy Spirit. Why pray? The answer should be easy; should it not, dear believer? We spend time in prayer because the creator of the universe desires you and me. Yes, what an amazing thought, right? It is almost as if it is “too good to be true.” So next time the doubts and the motivation prevail, remember that God waits to bless you with His very presence.

APPLY

1. Considering that prayer is more than asking for things but a communion with God, how does this understanding change your approach to prayer and your motivation to engage in it? Reflect on the perspective shift from seeing prayer as a request platform to an intimate conversation with God and how this impacts your prayer life.
2. How does the reality of God's desire for communion and His jealousy for your soul inspire you to approach Him with confidence and regularity in prayer? Think about how the knowledge of God's deep longing for a relationship with you can encourage you to pray more frequently and with greater assurance.
3. In light of the understanding that your salvation is an ongoing experience secured in Christ, how does this enhance your joy and holiness, and how does it motivate you to cherish prayer as a vital part of your spiritual life? Contemplate how the awareness of your eternal security in Christ influences your experience of joy and holiness, and how this realization fuels your desire to pray.

11 Fellowship

Hebrews 10:25

The first law of thermodynamics says that energy cannot be created or destroyed. As a reader, you may be asking, “What does the First Law of Thermodynamics have to do with Christian fellowship?” The simple answer is absolutely nothing. However, you must realize that just as there are rules for how the universe is run, there are also rules for how Christian life should be run. The unknown author in Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is confident that the true Christian will not abandon Christian fellowship because a true Christian desires to be in the presence of other genuine believers. At times, in the Christian life, one is not always as passionate to be around the church. However, that very state should make us tremble and examine our lives to see whether sin or deceptive thoughts are controlling our attitude toward other believers around us. There is an old saying, “Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are.” A simple statement that deserves much attention and examination. The people you surround yourself with are a reflection of who you are. This is why it is so important to be a part of a healthy church that preaches the Scriptures expositionally and practices the means of grace that God has graciously given the church universally. True Christians love to be around other Christians. The Apostle Paul himself, when lacking fellowship, expressed his desire in 2 Timothy 4:9–11, *“Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”*

Even the Apostle Paul, as great as he was, knew he was nothing without the fellowship of the brethren. May you and I, dear believer, not even for a second think we are stronger or more spiritual than the Apostle Paul. The one who visited the third heaven and even still, at the end of the day, longed to be with other believers who followed the precious and worthy one, Jesus Christ. Blood bought the believers' desire to be around each other because it is the blood of Christ that brought them to the throne of grace, and it is the blood of Christ that unites us together.

APPLY

1. Reflecting on the importance of Christian fellowship as highlighted in Hebrews, how does your current involvement with other believers reflect your commitment to and desire for fellowship? Consider how actively you seek and participate in fellowship with other Christians and what this says about your spiritual health and priorities.
2. Given the Apostle Paul's emphasis on the necessity of fellowship, even in his own ministry, how can you prioritize and nurture relationships within your church community? Think about practical steps you can take to deepen your connections with fellow believers, recognizing the vital role fellowship plays in your spiritual life.
3. In light of the idea that 'the people you surround yourself with are a reflection of who you are,' how does this influence your choices in building and maintaining Christian relationships?: Contemplate how your choice of company impacts your spiritual growth and how you can make conscious decisions to be around those who encourage your faith in Christ.

12 Teaching / Reading

Ephesians 4:11-16

One of the ordinary means of grace that were previously mentioned was labeled as teaching/reading. In Acts 2, it says that the early church devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching. We believe and understand that the Apostles are no longer around today; however, their letters are what make up the New Testament. The gospels present the life and death of Christ, and letters, written by the apostles to different churches, offer instruction. Moreso, teaching is a practice that was established by God in the church as a way to equip the saints for ministry, to build up the Body of Christ, and to reinforce the doctrines and beliefs of the church.

Therefore, we seek to emphasize these two aspects of "the Apostle's teaching" in our day and age. We have been given God's complete revelation and are called to read it and meditate upon it. The more you read, the more you come to realize, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the words within the Bible give life. It is the word of God that He has given to mankind. Additionally, God has raised up men who proclaim this word to His church, and it is their responsibility to keep this word undefiled until the coming of Christ. So, as you go through life, never forget the importance of reading and meditating upon God's word but also cherishing the moments when God's word is taught. Through the work of the Spirit, you will come to love and long for every moment of reading and hearing God's word.

APPLY

1. How does the practice of regularly reading and meditating on Scripture influence your understanding of God and His will for your life? Reflect on the impact that consistent engagement with the Bible has on your spiritual growth and discernment.
2. Considering the role of teaching in the church, how do you value and respond to the preaching and teaching of God's word in your church community? Think about your attitude towards and reception of biblical teaching within your church, recognizing its role in equipping and edifying you for ministry.
3. In what ways can you cultivate a deeper love and longing for the moments of reading and hearing God's word, as guided by the Holy Spirit? Contemplate practical steps to enhance your desire and appreciation for Scripture and its teaching, acknowledging the Holy Spirit's work in deepening your passion for God's word.

13 Fasting

Matthew 6:17-18

Fasting is a spiritual discipline—more than just abstaining from food; it's an intentional denial of bodily desires to deepen one's relationship with God. This voluntary act is often a response to life's challenges, a desire to understand God's will, or a feeling of burden from sin. The essence of fasting lies in setting a purpose focused on knowing God more deeply, maintaining privacy as instructed in Matthew 6:17-18, and combining it with prayer and scripture study. Fasting is not just abstaining from food; it is a heartfelt act of replacing physical hunger with spiritual longing.

During fasting, engage in deep introspection and earnest prayer. Confess sins, crucify fleshly desires, and focus fully on God, using prayer and Scripture as a shield against temptation, and listen for the Holy Spirit's guidance. The results of fasting include spiritual clarity, increased strength and focus, deepened prayer, humility, repentance, breakthroughs, deliverance, healing, and personal transformation, as seen in the experiences of biblical figures like Jesus, Ezra, and Daniel. It's not the length but the depth of surrender to God that counts. Reflect on your purpose for fasting and how aligning your thoughts with God's will could transform your life. Consider what insights or desires emerge during this time and how they align with God's will, preparing you for fasting when you feel led to it.

APPLY

1. How can fasting, as an act of intentional denial, enhance your spiritual clarity and strengthen your relationship with God? Reflect on the potential impact of fasting on your spiritual life, particularly in terms of clarity and deepened connection with God.
2. In what ways can combining fasting with prayer and Scripture study help you to crucify fleshly desires and focus more fully on God? Consider how incorporating prayer and Scripture into your fasting practice can aid in overcoming temptations and deepening your spiritual focus.
3. As you contemplate fasting, what specific intentions or areas of spiritual growth are you seeking to address, and how do these align with God's will for you? Think about the purpose behind your decision to fast and how this aligns with God's desires for your spiritual journey and personal transformation.

14 Loving Others and Evangelism

Matthew 28:19-20

One of the central aspects of the Christian life is love. Believers are called to love others as they have been loved in Christ. How are believers loved by Christ? We are forgiven, shown grace, and saved, despite what we've done. Likewise, Christians are called to love not only other Christians but all people in the same way. We must forgive when forgiveness is due and likewise ask for forgiveness when necessary; we must serve with joy and seek the betterment of those around us. We are the light of Christ in this world and are called to show the love of Christ that we have been shown. One of the greatest ways for a Christian to do this is through evangelism.

Evangelism is one of the central teachings and callings of Christianity, in which the love of Christ is shared with those who have not yet come to know Him. In Matthew 28:19-20, commonly known as the Great Commission, Jesus instructs His followers to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." After delivering this instruction to His followers, Jesus continues with a message of assurance, lovingly proclaiming that "I am with you always, to the end of the age." This passage underscores the responsibility of all believers: to love others through the proclamation of the Gospel and to make disciples of all nations. The doctrine of evangelism lies in the selfless expression of God's love by sharing the transformative message of salvation. Christians are called to engage in compassionate outreach, showing Christ's

love in both word and deed. This act of evangelism is a true embodiment of Christian love, as believers seek to extend the invitation of grace to others.

APPLY

1. Reflecting on the way Christ loves us, how can you more actively demonstrate that love to others, both within and outside the Christian community? Consider practical ways to express Christ's love through forgiveness, service, and seeking the betterment of others in your daily interactions.
2. In light of the Great Commission, how can you incorporate evangelism into your life as an expression of love and obedience to Christ's command? Think about specific opportunities or methods you can use to share the Gospel and Christ's love with those who have not yet come to know Him.
3. How does understanding evangelism as an extension of Christ's love influence your approach to sharing the Gospel, and what steps can you take to ensure your evangelistic efforts are grounded in compassion and sincerity? Contemplate how the perspective of evangelism as a selfless expression of love shapes your approach and commitment to this vital aspect of Christian life.

15 Spiritual Warfare and Overcoming Persecution

Mark 4:35-41

Spiritual warfare is an integral part of the Christian journey, where God, in His love, allows challenges to draw us closer to Him. Experiencing struggles and doubts isn't the absence of faith; they're signs of a faith being tested and strengthened. Jesus assures us of His support, reminding us that our struggles are not setbacks but setups for God to manifest Himself powerfully in our lives. We're reminded in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God doesn't allow challenges beyond our capacity, and each battle is a stepping stone to victory. Our mindset during battle is crucial. Like Jesus, who slept through the storm, we're called to rest in the assurance of God's sovereignty (Mark 4:35-41). Jesus tells us to not be afraid. He isn't trying to deny our experiences; rather, He is trying to let us know that He knows something we don't and that we just need to trust that. Because God is not confined by time, He is watching over you right now during the struggle and the victory, perfectly orchestrating this season in your life. You are currently living in the testimony of God's faithfulness, which He will make known to you when He wants to. How empowering!

So do not be passive; actively engage in battle, equipped with faith, prayer, and the Word as your weapon. Our actions amidst the storm—how we grip our weapons—reveal the depth of our trust in Christ. We should keep in mind the ultimate victory won by Jesus, which makes our current struggles temporary. This knowledge fills us with the confidence of champions. Aligning our desires with God's will, seeking His purpose in our trials, and submitting to His plans are key.

The Bible provides a spiritual arsenal for different aspects of the battle: James 1:2-4 and Hebrews 12:1-11 for faith and perseverance; Romans 8:18-30 and 2 Corinthians 4:1-15 for trust in God's plan; 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 1 Peter 4:12-19 for strength in trials; John 15:8-16:4 and Philippians 3:12-21 for assurance of victory; Matthew 11:28-30 and Psalm 119:153-160 for rest and comfort; Mark 4:35-41 and Philippians 1:12-18 for embracing God's sovereignty; Matthew 5:3-13 and 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 for courage and resilience; and Psalm 109 and Romans 8:35-39 for overcoming temptation.

APPLY

1. Considering that spiritual warfare is a means to draw closer to God, how can you use your current struggles and doubts as opportunities to deepen your faith and reliance on Him? Reflect on how you can view challenges not as setbacks, but as setups for experiencing God's power and faithfulness in your life.
2. How does the assurance of ultimate victory in Christ influence your approach to current trials, and what steps can you take to align your desires with God's will during these times? Think about how the knowledge of Christ's victory over sin and death can empower you to face trials with confidence and seek God's purpose in them.
3. What specific scriptures from the Bible's 'spiritual arsenal' can you use to strengthen your faith, trust, and perseverance during spiritual battles? Identify passages from the Bible that resonate with your current situation and consider how they can provide guidance, comfort, and strength as you navigate your spiritual journey.

16 Discerning the Voice of God

Jeremiah 33:3, John 8:47, John 16:13

Discerning the voice of God is a common struggle, often clouded by our own thoughts or external influences. Understanding how God communicates is crucial for deepening our faith and following His will. God's voice is not indecisive, pressuring, anxious, doubt-inducing, contradictory to Scripture, condemning, confusing, or leading to sin. Also, don't expect an audible voice that comes from the sky. Instead, it is stable, consistent, guiding, peaceful, affirming, aligned with Scripture, convicting, reassuring, and leading to holiness. Think of God's voice more as an understanding of who He is and His plan. To understand God, it's essential to silence ungodly voices (secular music, ungodly peers, social media) through prayer, scripture study, and recognizing the Holy Spirit's presence. This ability grows from a deep, transparent relationship with God and consistent engagement with His Word. Remember, God speaks at His timing, not ours, and silence can be a time for faith rather than direct guidance.

Silencing voices contrary to God's nature involves doing the opposite of what they suggest. Dismiss thoughts that cause anxiety, confusion, or urgency, and focus on God's peace and truth. Practical steps include being spiritually close to God, establishing a scriptural foundation, reducing life's noise, obeying God's directions, seeking understanding, and considering fasting as a way to heighten spiritual senses. Reflect on how you've discerned God's voice in the past. Spend time in silent prayer, asking God to reveal His voice through His Word, and be open to

convictions or ideas that align with His nature. Don't be discouraged by the lack of immediate answers; trust in God's perfect timing.

APPLY

1. How can you actively silence ungodly influences in your life to better discern God's voice, and what specific steps can you take to focus more on His peace and truth? Reflect on practical ways to reduce distractions and conflicting voices, concentrating instead on God's guiding presence.
2. Considering your past experiences, how have you recognized God's voice, and how does it differ from your own thoughts or external pressures? Think about instances where you've felt God's guidance and how it stood out from your own ideas or the influence of others.
3. What practices can you adopt to cultivate a deeper, more transparent relationship with God, enhancing your ability to understand and follow His will? Contemplate habits or disciplines you can develop to strengthen your connection with God and become more attuned to His communication with you.

PHASE 2

Now that you have finished this devotional, it is time for you to continue with the Bible. In your spiritual journey, remember that while devotionals and spiritual books are helpful, they can't replace the Bible's transformative power. The Bible is not just a text but a direct connection to God's voice, offering personal revelations and a path to true holiness. It's a lifelong journey with no shortcuts. Engaging directly with God's teachings allows for a deeper understanding and a stronger relationship with Him. The Bible's intricate wisdom and understanding makes every reading a new, exciting discovery about God's character. Reading it is a joyous and eager pursuit, not a burdensome task. If it feels like a chore, start by reading the book of John to reevaluate your understanding of Jesus.

As you embark on this journey, integrate Bible reading with prayer. Start by asking God to silence distractions and amplify the Holy Spirit's voice. Make your reading active and intentional: write notes, highlight passages, and journal your thoughts. There's no perfect way to explore God's Word; what matters is your effort and sincerity. After reading, reflect on what you've learned about God and use this as a foundation for your prayers. Be transparent with God in your prayers, as this honesty shows your surrender to Him as the sovereign Lord. This combination of reflective reading and heartfelt prayer forms a deeper, more authentic relationship with God, guiding you on a transformative journey of faith.

We hope that you have come to see the beauty in God's plan of salvation and in His wonderful formation of His Church. This has all been orchestrated for our good and is in no way meant to be threatening or fear-inducing.

Rather, it is to bring us peace and comfort in our journey through this life. As we stated at the beginning, the purpose of this booklet was to simply set a small foundation for your faith. What now? Well, now begins what we pray is a life of dedication, boldness, perseverance, and sacrifice to and for the Lord. Most importantly, we strongly encourage you to continue these conversations with your local church leaders. If you have any questions regarding these topics, need clarification, or simply want to talk about them more, we encourage you to do this in your local church by approaching a local leader. Whether that is your pastor or youth pastor, these are people that God has placed in your life to guide you and help shape you into the image of Christ. For girls who may not feel comfortable approaching your pastor, it is perfectly fine to approach your pastor's wife or an older, godly woman in the church. The important thing is to approach them, get involved, and get the support you need. The Christian life is not a road walked alone, but rather a road of humility in which we look to others for support and likewise support those who need it. So, we encourage you to be bold, move onward with Christ, and find your joy and satisfaction in Him.

WHAT SHOULD I READ?

Here are some books of the Bible that are great places to start:

- **Gospel of John:** It provides a clear and thorough presentation of Jesus' life and divinity, making it great for understanding the core of Christian faith.
- **Psalms:** This book offers emotional connection and spiritual comfort, showing a range of human experiences and emotions in relation to God.
- **Proverbs:** Full of practical wisdom, it gives guidance on living a life that is pleasing to God, covering various aspects of daily living.
- **Ephesians:** It outlines the basics of Christian belief and the church, along with practical advice on Christian living.
- **Luke:** Known for its detailed account of Jesus' life, this Gospel connects well with believers who appreciate historical context.
- **Romans:** A foundational book for understanding Christian doctrine, especially salvation, faith, and grace.
- **Acts:** It tells the story of the early church and the spread of the Gospel, providing a historical backdrop to Christianity.
- **James:** This book is practical and straightforward, emphasizing the application of faith in daily life.
- **Genesis:** As the book of beginnings, it sets the foundation for understanding the whole Bible, covering creation, fall, and God's covenant.
- **1 John:** Offers insights on God's love and our response, emphasizing the assurance of salvation and how to live in fellowship with God and others.

HOW TO BE INTENTIONAL

As you start your journey of exploring God's Word, consider these questions to build a more intentional and meaningful Bible reading experience. They are intended to prepare your heart and mind, aligning your focus with God's voice and deepening your understanding of His truths:

- **What am I seeking through this reading?:** Before opening the Bible, clarify your intention. Are you looking for guidance, comfort, understanding, or simply to know God better? This will shape your approach to reading and your prayer for insight.
- **How do I need God to speak into my life today?:** Reflect on the areas of your life where you need wisdom or peace. This helps in praying specifically for God's voice to address these areas through His Word.
- **Am I open to hearing whatever God might have to say, even if it's challenging?:** Assess your readiness to receive and accept God's message, whether it's one of encouragement, correction, or something unexpected.
- **What distractions do I need to surrender to God before I begin?:** Identify any external noise or internal worries that might hinder your focus. Pray to let go of these distractions and to tune your heart to the frequency of the Holy Spirit.
- **How can I apply what I learn today in my life?:** Approach your reading with the mindset of application. This anticipates that God's Word will not just be information, but a transformational truth to be lived out.

PATH OF PRAYER

1. **Kneeling Before God:** "As I kneel before the Lord, how can I express my reverence and humility, recognizing His majesty and sovereignty over all?"
2. **Praising God:** "What specific attributes and acts of God can I praise and thank Him for today, reflecting on what I've read and experienced in my life?"
3. **Submitting to God's Purpose:** "In what areas of my life do I need to surrender more fully to God's will and purpose, as revealed through His Word?"
4. **Asking for Sustenance:** "What are my current needs, physical, spiritual, or emotional, for which I need to seek God's provision and sustenance?"
5. **Seeking Forgiveness:** "What sins or shortcomings do I need to confess and seek forgiveness for?"
6. **Asking for Strength:** "Where do I need God's strength and guidance most at this time, and how can I ask for His empowerment to face the challenges in my life?"
7. **Presenting Personal Requests:** "What personal desires, concerns, or situations do I want to bring before God, trusting in His wisdom and timing?"

