



## Basics of Christianity

If you recently put your faith in Jesus Christ, Basics of Christianity is a great place for you to learn more about some important topics. If you haven't taken that step but want to learn more about what Christians believe in your own search for truth, start here! This section covers topics like: What is sin, and what does salvation mean? Is it possible to resist temptation? How should we pray? And how can you tell others about Christ? Find answers to these questions and more in Basics of Christianity.

### Jesus Christ

People often ask, "What makes Jesus different from all the other religious leaders who ever lived?"

You see, the Bible – God's authoritative word – makes it very clear that Jesus was more than just another religious teacher or prophet. It tells us, instead, that Jesus was unique. First, He was unique in His person. He wasn't just an unusually spiritual individual. He was more than that; He was God in human flesh. Yes, He was fully man, but He was also fully God. The Bible puts it this way: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). This is what we celebrate at Christmas – God coming to earth in the form of man.

Second, Jesus was unique in His purpose. Why did He come to earth? He came for one reason: to save us from our sins. As Jesus Himself said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). He did this by becoming the final sacrifice for our sins through His death on the cross. We know His promise of eternal life is true because He did something no other person has ever done: He rose from the dead – what we call the resurrection – and still lives today.

For more about Jesus Christ, see "Is Jesus God?" under the Common Questions section.

### The Bible

#### Where does the Bible come from? A message from Billy Graham

The Bible is somewhat like a library because it is actually a collection of books.

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Those books were written over many centuries, and they were only gradually brought together into their present form. The first "collection" was probably the first five books of the Bible (often called the "Torah," which is the Hebrew word for God's Law). As time went on, other books were added.

The whole Old Testament was finished about four centuries before the time of Jesus. Only a few decades after His ministry, the books of the New Testament were written and then accepted by Christians. The most important fact about the Bible, however, is that God watched over its writing, and He has preserved it down to the present time.

The Bible isn't just another ancient book of human wisdom – it is God's Word, given to us to tell us how we can know God. The Bible says, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). God guided the authors as they wrote the different books.

What place does the Bible have in your life? God wants to speak to you through its pages; are you listening? Most of all, He wants you to come to know Him by discovering Jesus Christ, who is at the center of the Bible.

## **Reading the Bible**

### **A message from Billy Graham**

The Bible is big – so big that even the greatest scholar will never exhaust its riches.

But the Bible isn't just for preachers and scholars! God wants to speak to you through His Word, and no matter who you are, the Bible can come alive to you. You may never understand everything in the Bible, but you can understand something. Samuel was still a boy when God answered his simple prayer: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9). Make that your prayer as well.

So why does the Bible remain a closed book to many? One reason is because we don't realize how much we need it. If I suggested you stop eating for a few months, you'd ignore me – and rightly so. We need food in order to survive, and without food we'll grow weak and eventually die. Yet many Christians are spiritually starved and weak because they ignore the spiritual "food" God has provided in the Bible. The Bible is not an option; it is a necessity. You cannot grow spiritually strong without it.

Job said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread" (Job 23:12). Is the Bible this important to you? How can you discover the Bible's message? How can the Bible become part of your life?

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Learn the Bible from others. God has given some people a special gift to understand the Bible and teach it to others. The Bible says that “in the church, God has appointed ... teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28). Listen carefully when your pastor preaches from the Bible. Seek out a Bible class in your church or community where the Bible is faithfully taught. Also check your local Christian radio station (if you live in a country that permits religious broadcasting); some of today’s most gifted Bible teachers are on radio. Investigate spending part of your vacation at a conference center devoted to Bible teaching. Many people find daily devotional books based on the Bible helpful. Although they may examine only a verse or two each day, God can use them to encourage you.

One of the most significant spiritual movements in recent decades has been the explosion in small group Bible studies. All over the world, Christians are coming together to read the Bible and share their insights. The Bible says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another” (Colossians 3:16). Jesus promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20, NKJV).

Learn the Bible on your own. If you have never read the Bible, or you started reading it once but got bogged down, let me encourage you to discover the Bible for yourself. How can you do this?

First, come to the Bible joyfully. Bible reading shouldn’t be a burden but a joy! I vividly remember the day I received Ruth’s letter saying she had decided to accept my proposal for marriage. I probably read and reread it dozens of times that day.

God wants to talk with us through His Word; in fact, it is His “love letter” to us. Why shouldn’t we come to it joyfully?

Then come to the Bible prayerfully and expectantly. Ask God to speak to you through its pages and expect Him to do so. This doesn’t mean that every time we open the Bible we’ll find something new; God may be underlining truths we already know. But let the psalmist’s prayer become yours: “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Psalm 119:18).

In addition, come to the Bible systematically. Some people open their Bibles almost at random or simply reread passages they already know. While God can certainly speak to us through any passage, we also need to remember that the Bible wasn’t written [to be read] that way.

# GOING FARTHER

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Get in the habit of reading the Bible the way it was written: one book at a time. I often suggest people begin by reading through one of the Gospels, such as John, perhaps only a few paragraphs at a time. Later you can read Acts, which tells of the early Christians, or some of the New Testament letters. Psalms in the Old Testament – the “hymnbook” of the Bible – has blessed generations of believers, while Proverbs gives practical guidance for daily living. Psalms teaches us how to relate to God, and Proverbs teaches us how to relate to others.

Also come to the Bible thoughtfully. In other words, be sure you understand what you are reading. Several years ago, a woman told me that her grandmother reads a chapter of the Bible every day. Then she added, “But whenever I ask her what she’s just read, she can’t tell me. Reading the Bible is just a habit that doesn’t seem to make any impression on her.” Focus on what the passage is really saying. What is happening in it? What is its central point or primary teaching? What does it say about God, or about Jesus, or about someone’s response to God?

Finally, come to the Bible obediently. James wrote, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). Is God pointing out a truth you should believe or something you should do? Is He revealing a sin for which you need to repent? Remember: God never leads us to do anything that is contrary to His Word. But the opposite is also true: God always leads us to do everything that is in agreement with His Word.

God gave the Bible to us because He wants us to know Him and love Him and serve Him. Most of all, He gave it to us so we can become more like Christ. Make the Bible part of your life – beginning today.

See “Is the Bible true?” under the Common Questions section for more on the Bible.

## **Sin**

What is sin? Some call it “errors” or “mistakes” or “poor judgment.” This may be a good starting point, but as we learn more about God and the Bible, we see that it’s something much more serious. Sin is falling short of the perfect standard God has set. And, by our very nature, we are all falling short of His standard. We are all guilty. We have all sinned against Him.

## **A message from Franklin Graham**

# GOING FARTHER

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The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The angel announced to Joseph that the Child in Mary’s womb should be called “Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to be baptized, he exclaimed, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The Bible mentions sin so frequently for a very good reason – it is sin, our sin, that separates us from God and, if not dealt with through faith and repentance, brings eternal death. Facing the truth about our sin and its deadly consequences is a biblical prerequisite to receiving Jesus as Savior.

That’s why I was shocked when I attended a Christian conference and one of the speakers said that we should not mention sin in our preaching because it is offensive. Sin certainly is offensive, but the Person who is affronted is the Holy God. God hates sin. He is eternally, fiercely opposed to it and cannot tolerate it in His presence. That’s why the Scripture spends so much time speaking about sin. It is our fundamental problem and, if ignored, leaves us to rely on our own futile resources for a solution. However, as much emphasis as the Bible places on the reality and peril of sin, it puts an even greater weight on the cure for sin – salvation through personal faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Sin has been dealt with. There is deliverance because we have a Deliverer. There is salvation because we have a Savior. There is redemption because we have a Redeemer.

The Good News is that God forgives sin. He poured out His divine wrath against it by punishing His own Son on the cross. “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5, NASB). Sin’s penalty – eternal death – was paid in full when Jesus died as our substitute at Calvary.

When we turn from our sin – acknowledge our rebellion against God and utter inability to save ourselves – and turn to God in faith, we receive the free gift of salvation. We did nothing to earn it, because we can’t.

Amazingly, God not only took away our sins; He also credited His righteousness to us. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB). Martin Luther called this the “great exchange,” our sin for His righteousness.

Sin is indeed bad news. We are lost, hopeless and without God. However, as we put aside our pride and admit our sin, we are ready to receive the glorious salvation of Jesus Christ.

# GOING FARTHER

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## **If I'm a Christian and keep sinning, will God turn away from me?**

It's true that sin puts up a barrier between us and God and cuts us off from the fellowship He wants us to have with Him. The Bible says, "But your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

But that doesn't mean God refuses to have anything to do with us. In fact, He wants us to come back to Him and have our fellowship with Him restored – and He does everything He can to wake us up and bring us to repentance. Sometimes the only way He can do this is by making us so miserable that we finally realize what we've done and turn back to Him. Sometimes He quietly shows His love to us even when we don't deserve it, hoping to awaken us to His goodness.

Think about what happens in a family when someone wrongs his or her relative. That person is still a member of the family; nothing can change that. But a barrier has come between that person and the rest of the family; their fellowship has been broken. The only way to restore it is by confessing the sin and asking for forgiveness. The same is true with us.

Don't let sin come between you and God. God loves you, and Christ died to take away our sins. When we do sin, however, we need to confess it and seek God's forgiveness at once. The longer it goes on, the more the devil rejoices.

## **Salvation**

Salvation is being saved or rescued from the penalty of sin. We are all sinners, and the consequence of sin is death — not just physical death, but eternal separation from God. To be saved from your sin, you must do three things: Ask forgiveness for your sins; be willing to turn from your sins; and believe that Jesus Christ — our Lord and Savior — died for your sins and rose again.

If you have done these things, you are saved! You have salvation, which means you have accepted God's love and forgiveness, are adopted into His family and have fellowship with His people — your fellow Christians. You are free from the power of sin — a child of God! The Bible promises you eternity in heaven (Romans 10:9-10).

# GOING FARTHER

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## **How are we saved?**

John 3:16-17 and John 10:10 tell of the great love God has for us. Because of His love, He wants us to come to Him just as we are. He wants to have a personal relationship with us and longs for us to talk to Him freely about our sins and our needs.

God revealed His love for us by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins more than 2,000 years ago. Jesus understands us because He lived as a man on earth for 33 years. He lived a sinless life and paid the price for our sins by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice on the cross. He rose from the dead three days later and went up into heaven, where He intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

## **Don't good people go to heaven?**

Many people think that being good will get them into heaven — that if they are nice, don't commit any crimes and try to do the right thing, they have earned their way into God's kingdom.

But the Bible says we all fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). We all sin, and the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). There's nothing we can do to earn our way into heaven.

But God made a way by sending Jesus Christ to die for our sins! None of us are good enough to get to heaven on our own, but if we ask Christ into our lives, we can look forward to eternity with Him in heaven. It's not about good things you've done, but about what Christ has done for you (Ephesians 2:8). It's not about emotions you might feel, but about what God's Word tells you (1 John 5:11-13). Jesus provides the only path to salvation.

## **So what do I do?**

Jesus has all power and authority over sin and evil (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8), and through Him we can also live victorious lives. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" The Bible also says in 1 Corinthians 15:57: "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The first thing you must do to be saved is admit to God that you are a sinner. Then repent of your sins. What is repentance? Repentance carries with it the idea of confession, sorrow, turning and changing. We shouldn't ask forgiveness over and over again for our sins and then return to those sins, expecting God to forgive us. We must turn from our practice of sin as best we know how, and turn by faith to Christ as our Lord and Savior. None of us are

# GOING FARTHER

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perfect, and we will continue to sin, but the important part is that we are genuinely sorry for our sin and make our best effort to correct it.

Once you repent of your sins, ask for God's forgiveness and recognize Jesus as Lord, thank God for His love and acceptance of you. If we give ourselves to Jesus, He comes into our hearts and lives there (Revelation 3:20). We must commit ourselves to Him and trust Him alone as our Savior and Lord.

Have complete confidence in everlasting life by accepting Christ, and experience the joy that comes from knowing Him personally.

## **How do I know I'm saved? A message from Billy Graham**

Some people doubt that they are actually Christians. They *want* to be, but feel like they are missing the joy of the Christian faith.

The dreadful uncertainty that haunts many people grows out of misunderstanding what the Christian experience is. Some people don't seem to know the nature of Christian conversion, while others have been misinformed concerning conversion and seek an experience that is not biblical. Many confuse faith with feeling.

Faith always implies an object – that is, when we believe, we must believe something. That something I call the “fact.” Now let me give you three words that will help you understand the Christian life: *fact*, *faith* and *feeling*. They come in this order, and the order is essential. In this order, you will have the joy and confidence of one who can say, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12).

First, you are saved through a personal faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as defined in the Scriptures. The Gospel refers to the news of Christ's death and resurrection in order to pay the penalty for our sins and provide a way to eternal life.

Though it might at first seem dogmatic and narrow-minded to you, the **fact** remains that there is no other way to be saved from your sins than by God's grace through your faith in Christ. The work of Christ is a fact, His cross is a fact, His tomb is a fact and His resurrection is a fact.

It is impossible to believe anything into existence. The Gospel did not come into being because men and women believed it, and Christ's tomb wasn't empty three days after His death because His followers believed it. The fact preceded the faith. We are psychologically



# GOING FARTHER

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incapable of believing without an object of our faith. Christians do not call upon people to believe something that is not credible, but to believe in the fact of history. Trusting in Christ for your eternal salvation is trusting in a fact – not in a figment of someone’s imagination.

**Faith** is the second of these three words. Faith is rationally impossible where there is nothing to believe. Faith must have an object. The object of Christian faith is Christ. Faith means more than agreeing with the claims of Christ; faith involves the will – a decision to believe in Christ. If you say with your mind and your heart, “Yes, I believe in Christ and receive what He has done for me” – that He died for my sins – then you have eternal life. Faith, then, means surrender and commitment to the claims of Christ. It means acknowledging sin and turning to Christ. We do not know Christ through the five physical senses, but we know Him through the “sixth sense” that God has given every man and woman – the ability to believe.

**Feeling** is the last of the three words, and it must remain last in your thinking. I believe that earnest and honest seekers for the salvation of God have unrest and uncertainty when they think they must have some kind of emotion to make conversion a true experience. If you are seeking salvation as it is presented through the Scriptures, you will want to know what kind of experience the Bible says you should have.

Maybe you went to a church altar, to an inquiry room, or knelt beside your radio or TV when an invitation was given to receive Christ. You heard the message, and you knew that you were a sinner in need of a Savior. In your lost and hopeless condition, you looked to Christ for salvation. You believed that He could and would save you. Maybe you read His invitation to sinners: “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

I have read carefully through the New Testament to see just what kind of experience you are entitled to. I have looked to see what the nature of the experience of conversion is, and I have found that the New Testament reveals only one: the experience of faith.

Believing is an experience as real as any experience, yet multitudes are looking for something more — some electric sensation that will bring a thrill to their physical bodies, or some other spectacular event. Many have been told to look for such spiritual thrills, but the Bible says that a man is “justified by faith” (Romans 3:28), and not by feeling. A person is saved by trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross and not by bodily sensations and religious ecstasy.

Still, you might say, “Is there no place in saving faith for any feeling?” Certainly there is



room for feeling, but we are not saved by it. Whatever feeling there may be is the result of saving faith, but feeling never saved a single soul.

When I understand something of Christ's love for me as a sinner, however, I respond with a love for Christ, and love has feeling. Those who love Christ also have a confidence in Him that raises them above all fear.

To have a guilty conscience is also a feeling, and the Bible teaches that Christ cleanses the conscience: "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14).

To have a guilty conscience cleansed and to be free from its constant accusation is an experience, but it is not the cleansing of the conscience that saves you. It is faith in Christ that saves. A cleansed conscience is the effect of a right relationship with God.

Joy is a feeling as well. So is inward peace. Love for others is a feeling. Concern for the lost is a feeling. But these feelings are not conversion. Again, the only experience you can look for and expect is the experience of believing in Jesus Christ.

Finally, someone might say, "I believe the historic facts of the Gospel, but nothing has changed for me. I don't think I'm saved." Perhaps you are not, for the faith that saves has one distinguishing quality: Saving faith is a faith that produces obedience. It is a faith that brings about a way of life. Some have successfully imitated this way of life for a time, but for those who trust Christ for salvation, that faith brings about a desire to live out that inward experience of faith. It is a power that results in godly living.

## **Holy Spirit**

### **Taken from a message by Billy Graham**

It is impossible to understand the Bible, Christian living, the structure of the church or our own relationship with God without understanding the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an "it." The Holy Spirit is a person. The Bible says that He is not *something*. He is Someone. He is God.

To understand this better, let's talk about the Trinity. There are three persons in the Trinity — God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Christians do not worship multiple gods; they worship one God who takes on different forms. God the Son, or Jesus Christ, was

# GOING FARTHER

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God in human form. The Holy Spirit lives inside us when we accept Christ and helps us grow closer to God.

The moment we receive Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is all-powerful and present everywhere. The Holy Spirit teaches us and takes us deeper into God's truth as we go along in our Christian life.

There is not a person anywhere who can be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. There is not a person who can follow Christ without the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sees everything that goes on. He knows what goes on in our hearts. He knows what goes on in our minds. Nothing is hidden from Him.

The Holy Spirit is also called holy. The Bible says, "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). One of the Holy Spirit's ministries is to help make us holy – to become more like Christ.

## **How does the Holy Spirit work?**

**First**, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8, NKJV). He uses a mother's prayers, or a tragic experience, or a pastor's sermon, or some other experience to convict us of sin and of our need to give our lives to Jesus Christ. He points to us and says, "You are a sinner. You need to repent."

We don't like to hear that, but without conviction, we could never have our sins forgiven, we could never be saved and we could never go to Heaven.

**Second**, the Holy Spirit gives new life. The Bible says that we are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Our spirit within us, made in the image of God, is dead toward God. Mankind needs life. Yet, we have all sinned and, therefore, are dead toward God. The Holy Spirit, however, gives us new life in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3).

But how is someone born again? What does that mean? The Holy Spirit is the one who makes you born again; it is a supernatural act. It isn't the good things we've done, but God's mercy through the Holy Spirit that saves us (Titus 3:5). All we have to do is accept the free gift of salvation by accepting Christ.

**Third**, the Holy Spirit lives in us. As you read this, you may realize that you are spiritually dead, but God says, "I will put my Spirit in you. I will come to live in you." That's the reason



we should never take anything unclean into our bodies. That's the reason we should discipline our bodies. God loves your body. He doesn't want it polluted by fleshly lusts or harmful substances. The Bible says, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

**Fourth**, The Holy Spirit gives you power to serve Christ. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Christ is coming back again, and He is ready to come into your heart by the Holy Spirit and make you a new person. Will you accept Christ as your Savior?

## **Baptism**

Do Christians have to be baptized? And what does baptism really mean?

Baptism is not required to go to heaven, but it is a sign of obedience to God and a way of publicly declaring your decision to follow Christ. Christ commands His followers in Matthew 28:19 to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Remember that nothing we do will earn us [salvation](#). Salvation is not about our actions, but about what Christ has done for us — the fact that He died for our sins. We must recognize our sin and ask forgiveness for it, but the Bible says that we are saved "by grace ... through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is God's undeserved mercy.

You might recall the criminal who hung on a cross next to Christ when He was crucified. The criminal confessed Christ as Lord, and even though he didn't have a chance for baptism, his place in Heaven was secured (Luke 23:43). God is a perfect, holy God, and there is nothing we can do to be good enough to spend eternity with Him in heaven. It's all about what He has done for us.

At the same time, when we trust in Christ and desire to live the way He wants us to, it will show in our actions. We are changed because of His work in us. Baptism means that we identify ourselves with Christ; it's a sign that He washed away our sins by His death on the cross. Just as water often symbolizes life in the Bible, baptism is a sign of our new life with Christ.



Christian churches haven't always agreed on the details of baptism — how to do it or when, but they agree on its importance. Baptism reminds us that we aren't saved by our own good works, but because of Christ and what He did for us on the cross. As evangelist Billy Graham has said: "Baptism is a conclusive act of obedience and witness to the world that we are Christ's."

## **God's forgiveness**

Believing in God's forgiveness of your sin isn't always easy. But if you have sincerely given your life to Jesus and are trusting Him alone for your salvation, then God has promised to forgive you – and He cannot lie. The Bible says, "This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11-12). That includes you! The key is to depend not on your feelings, but on facts – the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection for you, the fact of your commitment to Him, the fact of God's promise to forgive you. Feelings come and go, and they can deceive us. The facts of God's Word, however, don't change. You can depend on them. Don't focus on your feelings, but on Jesus Christ and what He has done for you.

Imagine for a moment that you had a very wealthy relative, and one day you received a call from an attorney telling you that she died and left you a million dollars. What would you do? You might say, "Oh well, it can't be true," but would that be wise? Instead, you would probably accept by faith what he told you, then act on it.

In a far greater way, Jesus Christ offered you a gift – the gift of salvation – and you accepted it. Now act on it! Begin by thanking Him for saving and forgiving you, then seek to live for Him every day.

## **Does God forgive future sins?**

One of the Bible's greatest truths is that Christ died to take away all our sins — not just part of them, but all of them: past, present and future.

You shouldn't fear losing your salvation every time you sin. If that were the case, we would lose our salvation every day. Even if our actions are pure, our thoughts often are not. And even if our actions and thoughts are pure, we still sin because of the good things we *should* do but don't.

# GOING FARTHER

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Never forget: Your salvation does not depend on you and how good you are; it depends solely on Christ and what He has already done for you through His death on the cross. The Bible says that Christ "appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

Does that mean it doesn't matter whether or not you sin? No, of course not. Sin is serious; it is an offense to God, and it breaks our fellowship with Him. God calls us to "be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). We should also be a good witness for Christ; others should be able to look at us and tell that something is different about our lives.

You can't live the Christian life in your own strength. You need God's help, which is why He has given His Holy Spirit to you. When you sin, confess it immediately, then seek the Holy Spirit's help each day to live as you should.

## **God's will**

### **A message from Billy Graham**

God has a plan for every one of us. Many people go through life without ever thinking about it, but that doesn't change the fact that God put us here for a purpose. In other words, we aren't here by accident; we're here because God put us here. And He put us here for a reason – to know Him in a personal way and then live the way He wants us to live.

This is the greatest discovery you will ever make: You were created to know God and to be His friend forever. God not only has a general purpose for each of us, but He also has a specific plan for each of our lives. God knows all about you, and He has a plan for you.

That's why you can pray and seek God's will when you face decisions, and it is why you can know God is with you every moment of the day. The Bible says, "Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path" (Psalm 27:11).

## **Knowing God's will**

Knowing God's will can give you peace in the midst of suffering and everyday trials. When you are in constant fellowship with God, He will lead you in the fulfillment of His plan.

To know God's will, you must first know God Himself. You can do that by committing your life to Jesus Christ, who was God in human flesh. Christ came to earth to show us what God

# GOING FARTHER

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is like and save us from our sins, and once you accept Him into your heart, you are a child of God! You can know God's specific will for your life.

If you have accepted Christ, here are some ways to understand God's will for you:

— Make right any behavior or relationships that might keep you from knowing God's will. Is there a certain sin that continues to plague your life? Are you in an unhealthy relationship? Confess any wrongdoing, eliminate anything that might distract you from living a godly life and commit your life to God who can make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:6). The Bible says, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16).

— God will never ask you to do something outside of His will. Do you feel like He's telling you to take a certain action? Have godly friends encouraged you to use a certain talent? Don't ignore wise advice or your own common sense.

— Look at God's Word, the Bible. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." What does God command of you? Has a verse motivated you to do something?

— Pray and ask God to reveal His will to you.

— Make a list of pros and cons when faced with a decision. As you seek God's guidance, weigh your options.

## **How do you know when God is speaking?**

Maybe you've felt a tug to do something and wondered if it's God speaking. Our feelings and emotions can be tricky, and they can deceive us — especially if we depend on them alone for making a decision. God gave us our emotions, and they are important, but He also gave us our mental abilities, and when we face a decision, we need to look at it carefully and logically. Part of discerning God's will is to ask Him to help us see all sides of an issue — sometimes with help from others we trust.

But emotion and intellect aren't enough. When we face a decision, we need to pray about it, trusting God to lead us. We also need to do it in light of God's Word, the Bible. God will never lead you to do something that is not in accord with the Bible. Also remember to have an open mind when waiting for God to respond to your prayer. He might not answer right away, or His answer might be something you haven't considered.

# GOING FARTHER

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The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6, NASB). Make sure of your commitment to Christ, then submit every decision you face to Him. When we sincerely want God's will above all else, He will help us know what is right.

## **Living daily with God**

When we come to Christ, the barriers between us and God are broken down, and God Himself lives within us through His Holy Spirit. In other words, we now know God and He knows us. Think of it: We have a personal relationship with the God of the universe!

But like any other relationship, it needs to be nurtured and strengthened. If it isn't, it will wither and grow cold; God will seem distant to us, and we will no longer think of Him as our friend. We might even drift into behaviors that don't honor Him and instead lead us to destruction. The Bible warns, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. ... The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15, 17).

Wordly values include greed, lust and obsession with one's status. Godly values include serving and loving others and humility.

So how do we learn to do God's will – to walk with Him – every single day? Think of a human friendship: How do we grow closer to someone on a human level? By spending time with that person – talking, listening, sharing concerns and lending a hand when he or she needs help.

The same is true with God. When we read or hear His Word, the Bible, He speaks to us. When we pray, we speak to Him. And when we worship Him and obey Him, we are doing His will and participating in His work.

Followers of Christ are often called disciples. Once you decide to follow Him, it's important to begin a life of discipleship, following His teaching and telling others what He has done for us on the cross. If you have not already done so, try to organize your day so that you have a special time to spend alone with God. Be sure you don't neglect this "quiet time" because it will give you strength and power to resist Satan (James 4:7), to live above your circumstances (Romans 5:3-5) and to become a victorious Christian (1 Corinthians 10:13). It's also important to read your Bible daily. This will help you mature spiritually





(Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 3:17-19).

As you give your heart and life to Christ, you will grow as a Christian. Worship and fellowship in a Gospel-preaching church are also necessary for spiritual growth. See the section entitled "Church" for more.

## **Temptation**

Every Christian faces temptation. Even Jesus was tempted! So how can you resist the urge to give in and stay strong?

Think of it this way: Did you ever play with a couple of magnets when you were a child? If you did, you'll remember that the closer they got to each other, the harder it was to pull them apart.

Temptation is something like that. The more you dwell on it and the closer you let it get to you, the stronger its attraction will be. In fact, if you don't look out, the time may come when it will be almost impossible to pull away from it. Don't let that happen!

The first step you need to take is to flee from whatever is tempting you. Get as far from it as possible. The Apostle Paul told his young friend, Timothy, to "flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace" (2 Timothy 2:22).

Also remember that our thoughts are as important as our actions. In fact, Jesus had strong words for people who were outwardly righteous but inwardly corrupt. One reason is because our actions typically start with our thoughts. The Bible says, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts — murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

Don't entertain tempting thoughts. Avoid anything that fills your mind with sinful thoughts and fill it instead with good things by studying God's Word and praying for His guidance.

Most of all, you need God's help to fight this battle. If you have never done so, turn to Christ and ask Him to come into your life. Then ask Him to fill your heart with His love and power, and to crowd out whatever is wrong in your life. God has promised that "when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Ask Him to show you the way out — and then take it.

## **Prayer**

# GOING FARTHER

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Have you ever asked yourself what prayer is? Prayer is simply talking to God. It is for every moment of our lives, not just for times of suffering or joy. In fact, we should also use prayer to thank God for everything He has done in our lives.

Many people pray haphazardly. A few words spoken hastily in the morning, then we say goodbye to God for the rest of the day. At night we push through a few sleepy petitions. That is not the example of prayer that Jesus gave.

The Bible tells us to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This doesn’t mean we should spend every minute of the day on our knees, but that we should have a prayerful attitude at all times – acknowledge our dependence on God, obey Him and talk to Him throughout the day. Prayer should not be our last resort; we should start every day by giving it to God.

God loves us and has promised to hear us when we pray. How can you learn to pray? First, understand why prayer is possible.

Prayer is possible because Jesus Christ removed the barrier between us and God – a barrier caused by our sins. You see, sin separates us from God, and because of that, we have no right to come before Him. But by His death on the cross, Christ paid the penalty for our sins and removed the barrier. God then gives us the privilege of coming into His presence when we commit our lives to Christ. The Bible says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). If you have never done so, ask Christ to come into your life today.

Then understand that God now welcomes you into His presence and promises to hear you. The Bible says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14).

Even if God doesn't seem to answer your prayers at first, don't stop praying. He loves you, and no prayer goes unanswered. Sometimes, God answers our prayers when we don't realize it; He might answer “No,” or “Wait.” Yes, we think we know what's best for us, but God sees the whole picture, and sometimes He lovingly refuses to give us what we request because He knows it isn't according to His perfect plan.

We should also pray for others – even our enemies – as well as our leaders. When we pray for them, we should have faith that our prayers will be answered, but at the same time, remember to seek God's will.

# GOING FARTHER

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The Bible says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:5-6).

Maybe you find yourself praying in church, with a group of friends or at work. Sometimes, though, it might be easier to pray and hear God in silence. God Himself said, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Try to find a quiet place where you can approach God without distraction and give Him your complete attention. No matter where you pray, remember: Personal testimonies, church history and the Bible all confirm that prayer works.

## Church

People often ask, "Why is church important? Why do I need to go to a church once I'm saved?"

The Bible encourages believers – new and old alike – to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The first step in this process is to become actively involved in the ministry of a local church.

All Christians are members of the body of Christ. In fact, church is not just a building but a group of people who have decided to follow Christ as their Savior. It is God's will that Christians meet together as a spiritual body on the local level, which they have been doing for nearly 2,000 years. A number of New Testament letters were written to local groups of believers in different parts of the Roman Empire.

There are four main reasons we need church.

**First**, we need to identify ourselves with God's people, to be counted as Christ's followers, to come together and remain strong in the faith. Interaction with other believers builds friendship and gives spiritual stability. The writer of Hebrews 10:25 admonished the first-century followers of Christ: "Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of His coming back again is drawing near" (TLB). We cannot overemphasize the importance of fellowship in the church. There is something about fellowship within the body of believers in the local church that is unique and cannot be found elsewhere. If one live coal falls from the fire, it

# GOING FARTHER

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soon grows cold. The same principle holds true in the spiritual sense. To neglect fellowship in church is to give up the encouragement and help of other Christians. We gather together to share our faith and strengthen one another in the Lord.

**Second**, church brings people together for worship. There is nothing to compare with the work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's heart and mind during the singing of hymns and songs of praise, public Scripture readings, prayer and the teaching of God's Word.

**Third**, regular and accurate teaching of the Bible helps us grow and live successfully as Christians. Teaching that is in step with biblical truths convicts us to do what's right and helps us lovingly hold our fellow Christians accountable.

**Fourth**, church is ideal for serving Christ and others. The evangelist Billy Graham once wrote, "I would choose a church which opens its arms to everyone with a spiritual need, regardless of social standing or race, one which has concerns about the social sins of the community, which has a missionary vision and spirit which cooperates with any worthwhile effort to bring Christ to the world. I would also choose a church which is worthy of one's (financial gifts), and where I could unstintingly give of my talents and capabilities for the glory of God." As we seek a church like this, we will have the opportunity to minister to others. Our lives will bear witness to Christ's love (Matthew 5:16).

## **Other things to look for in a church**

Churches differ by congregation and community, but the main goal is to find one that focuses on teaching the Bible. Key teachings include: the Bible as the true, authoritative Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16); there is one God who exists in three persons – God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; Matthew 28:18-19); salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9); and spiritual maturity that develops as Christians dedicate themselves to prayer, studying the Bible and obeying God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Colossians 2:6-7).

No church is perfect. Every church is made up of sinners who struggle with the same things you do, so fellowship might require patience, forgiveness and love. Realize that you, too, are in need of these things.

It's also wise to not get involved with groups that call themselves Christians but deviate from the message of the Bible or don't practice what they preach. We should, however, still love and care for people who identify with these groups and use opportunities to share our faith with them.



## Telling others about Jesus

The Bible teaches that true followers of Christ will desire to tell others about Him and what He's done in their lives. (See John 4:28-30, 39-42 and 1 John 1:1-4.). Sharing with others – sometimes called witnessing since we are witnesses to Christ – is a vital part of the Christian life. God commands us and empowers us to be His witnesses (Matthew 4:19; Acts 1:8). Your testimony – or the story of how you came to trust in Christ – might not always be accepted, but through the Holy Spirit, you can receive power to live a victorious Christian life and serve Christ effectively. (See Ephesians 5:18 and Luke 11:13.)

Here are a few suggestions that might help you lead others to Christ: Live a consistent Christ-centered life (Matthew 5:17); be a friend and a good listener; pray that the Holy Spirit will give opportunities to share with others and prepare the individual to receive God's Word (John 16:7-11); and avoid arrogance and preachiness. Pray daily for the people on your prayer list and ask God for wisdom as you share Christ with them. (See James 1:5, 3:17.)

For more specific guidance on telling others about Jesus, check out [Lesson 4 - Witnessing for Christ](#) under Living In Christ on this website.

## The Gospel

### From a sermon by Roy Gustafson

When learning more about God or telling others about Him, you might wonder what exactly the word “Gospel” means. And how can you understand it? Here are 10 things you should know about the Gospel.

#### 1. The definition

What is the Gospel? In 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, the Apostle Paul wrote, “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.

Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried,

# GOING FARTHER

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that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve [disciples].” Christ also appeared to others, but the main point is that He died for our sins and rose again so we could have eternal life.

## 2. It's simple

You will be quick to notice that the Gospel is composed of two parts: First, Christ died for our sins; second, Christ rose from the dead.

## 3. It's not a religion

Religion is mankind's quest for God. The Gospel is the God seeking lost men and women through the Savior Jesus Christ. Religion can only produce an outward reformation; the Gospel creates an inward transformation.

## 4. It's free

No one can buy salvation. It comes as a free gift — by God's grace through our faith in Christ.

## 5. It's for anyone and everyone

It is called the “Gospel of our salvation” because it is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

## 6. It will free you

It is called the “Gospel of peace” because, through Christ, it makes peace between the sinner and God. Christ is the bridge to bring us to God.

## 7. It happened once for all time

Christ died once for our sins. It was a one-time event and provides a way to everlasting life today and forever.

## 8. It's unique

The key difference between our supernatural faith and other religions of the world is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

## 9. Its work has been done

A young pastor asked an aged and dying woman if she had made her peace with God. “No, I have not made peace with God, and I am not afraid to die,” she said. “You see, I do not need to make peace with God. Jesus Christ made peace with God 2,000 years ago, through the blood of His cross, and I am simply resting in the peace that He made.”

# GOING FARTHER

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## 10. You can receive it

If you will receive Christ, He will receive you, and you will find that this Gospel, which tells of His death, burial, and resurrection, is the power of God for eternal salvation.

“Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

To receive Christ, visit [www.peacewithgod.net](http://www.peacewithgod.net).

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