

NOW WHAT?

Your first steps with Jesus

by John Albiston

**WHAT IS THE
GOOD
NEWS?**



THE GOOD NEWS
IS THAT
GOD
IS GOOD
VERY
GOOD

He is the author of justice, generosity, and love. He's perfect in **every way**. The bad news is that we aren't perfect in **any way**. This is a problem, because good is the opposite of bad, and if God was okay with evil he wouldn't be very good.

We are often tempted to say, "But I'm a good person! I do more good than I do evil!" And this is probably true.

Unfortunately, there isn't a country in the world where it is okay to keep most of the law. Even keeping 99% of the law isn't good enough. As soon as we break just one law and commit a single crime we become criminals.

Sadly, it works the same way with God. As soon as we break one of God's laws we become spiritual criminals. And according to God himself, all of us have broken his laws, all of us are spiritual criminals, and all of us deserve to be punished. (ouch!)

But it
doesn't
END there

hope





HE PAID THE PRICE

Because God is just, there must be a punishment for every crime. But because God is love, he came down in human form to accept the punishment that we deserved. That's exactly what happened when Jesus died on the cross. We did the crime, but he paid the fine.

Jesus death on the cross opened up the door for our forgiveness. When he rose from the dead three days later he open up the door for a new life. Jesus said this was like being born again – we get a new life, a new heart, and a clean slate with God!

So how do we go through the door and find this forgiveness and new life?

Simple. We follow Jesus.

What does that mean?

It means that up until this point in our lives we've been leading our own lives. We do what seems right to us, when it seems right to us. Each of us has been following their own path.

Following Jesus is finally seeing that our own path has been the wrong path. Each and every one of us has messed up. We need to ask God for forgiveness for all of our mistakes and agree to leave our own path and allow Jesus to lead us on God's path.

We take all of who we are, all of our hopes and dreams, and place them into God's hands. Jesus will lead us and show us an entirely new way of thinking and a new way of living.

"What if God and I disagree with which way to go?"



Since God is perfect and you are not, we can safely guarantee that there will be disagreements about what to think and what to do.


Of course, since God is perfect and you are not, whenever you disagree - He will be the one who's right.

That's why we call it following Jesus instead of following yourself. If you've never done this it's pretty easy to do. You can stop right now and talk straight to God. Tell him you're sorry for the things you've done, thank him for the new life he's giving you, and agree to follow him wherever he leads you.


WHAT IS SALVATION?

You are a new creation

When you tell God that you are putting your life in his hands something amazing happens. God meets with you, personally. He really does! Not only that, but God begins to transform you into somebody new. The Bible has different ways of saying this: you have new life, you are born again, and you become a new creation. Any way you put it, you will never be the same.



Keep in mind this isn't an alien new you. You don't turn into a giraffe or anything like that. What God does is start to change you into the person you were always meant to be. We were all created on purpose – for a purpose. It is now that you will start to see God activate your purpose and destiny in a new way. You are now a child of God.



“But what if I don’t feel like a new person?”

While most people feel something powerful the moment they ask God for forgiveness and put their trust in Jesus to lead them through life, some do not. This is okay. Because our feelings go up and down like a roller coaster, God never tells us to put our trust in our feelings. Instead we put our trust in God and the promises He has made.





And what has God promised?

Well, there are four big promises
God has made to you as a new
follower of Christ:



THE PROMISE OF SALVATION

The first promise is the promise of salvation. God has forgiven us and saved us from the punishment we deserved.

He has also saved us **from** our harmful way of living and the spiritual slavery that comes with it. More than that, he has also saved us **for** something too! He has saved us **for** a new relationship with him and a new life where we can become a powerful force for good!



THE PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS

The second promise is the promise of forgiveness. Even when we are trying to follow Jesus we still screw up. The important thing to understand is that following Jesus is a process of transformation that takes place over time. There are a lot of new things to learn and new habits to develop.

Fortunately God has promised that nothing can ever separate us from him. Whenever we come to him and humbly ask forgiveness for our mistakes He has promised to forgive us and make us pure.



THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE

The third promise is the promise of his presence. No matter what happens, once we put our lives into God's hands God will never leave or abandon us. God has said that there is no one who can pluck us from his hand, and no power in heaven above or hell below that can separate us from his love. Guaranteed.

Will we always feel his presence or be consciously aware that he is here with us? No we won't. But, once again, we put our trust in God and what he has said in his word, not in our mood of the day.

THE PROMISE OF VICTORY

A fourth promise, and there are many more you will soon discover, is the promise of victory. As we begin our new life in Christ we find that our spiritual life will resemble our physical life. We start off as babies, and then we grow in knowledge, wisdom, and strength.

However, some of our old habits will die hard and in the process of growing in our relationship with Jesus we are going to have our share of bumps, bruises, and skinned knees.

The good news is that God has promised that, in time, he will complete the good work he has started in us. God isn't finished with you yet, and there is more to come!





FIRST STEPS

What are
the first
steps we
take when
we follow
Jesus?

GO TO CHURCH

One of the first steps we take is we start attending church and meet together regularly with others who have put their trust in Christ. According to what God has said in the Bible, we are now part of God's family. And just like a good family, it is important to spend time together, learn from each other, and look out for one another.

When we start going to church and meet with others in smaller groups to discover what God has to teach us, we get the support and information we need to begin the exciting process of spiritual transformation and growth.



PRAY EVERYDAY

Another step we need to take is learning to talk to God on a regular basis. If we want to develop a deeper relationship with someone – we kind of need to talk to them – the more often the better.

Prayer is simply talking to God. We can talk to him about anything, in any place, and at any time. There are three types of conversations we should have with God to get us started:

1 Prayer of thankfulness

The first is a prayer of thankfulness and gratitude. This is simply telling God how happy you are for who he is, what he has done, and what he has promised to do.

2 Prayer of forgiveness

The second is a prayer of forgiveness. While we are growing spiritually we are going to screw up. When we do it's always good to come clean with God, ask for forgiveness, and renew our decision to follow his path instead of our own.

3 Prayer of help

The third is a prayer of help. When we need help for healing, wisdom, or anything else we can turn to God. Will he always give us help exactly the way we want it? No. Sometimes he answers "yes", sometimes "no", and sometimes "wait". But he always answers. Out of love and what he knows is best for us in the long run.

READ YOUR BIBLE

If prayer is talking to God, reading your Bible is allowing God to talk to us. If we are going to follow God's leading in our lives then it's pretty important to listen to his instructions.

Of course, the Bible is a pretty big book and it's hard to know where to start.



■ Where
do I
start?

The Bible is divided into two parts. Books that were written before the time of Jesus are called the Old Testament, and books written during the time of Jesus are called the New Testament. While both are good, it's probably best to start reading the New Testament first.

To learn more about the life of Jesus try reading the Gospel of John. The letters of 1st John, 1st Peter, and Philippians are good places to start to learn about living the Christian life. The book of Proverbs is a good place to learn about wisdom, and the book of Psalms is a good place to learn about prayer.



Because of the way the Bible was written, it is usually best to read it only a paragraph or two at a time and then sit and think about what it means and how to apply that to your life. You can also read the Bible with another Christian, or even a group of Christians, in order to understand it more fully.

GET BAPTIZED

Another important first step is something called baptism. Back in Jesus' day, people would get baptized on the very first day they decided to follow Jesus. While we don't have to be in a panicked rush, it is still something important to do right away.

What is baptism?

It's basically getting dunked in a tank of water.

Why do we get baptized?

Because Jesus asked us to. If we are truly following Jesus lead in our lives we will do what he asks and get baptized just as Jesus himself was baptized.

What does baptism mean?

Baptism is an outward symbolic act that represents an inward spiritual reality. The waters of baptism represent the grave. Going down into the water represents dying to your old way of living. Rising up out of the water represents rising up into your new life of following Jesus.

It's pretty cool.



SPIRITUAL **GROWTH**

Once we've taken our first few baby steps in following God's lead in our lives it's time to start growing bigger, stronger, and faster. The Christian life isn't just life changing, it's world changing!

One of the most important things to remember is that we don't follow Jesus all alone. The Holy Spirit of God, yes, God himself, comes and lives within us!

The Spirit of God is always with us and he will always help us when we ask. He's always there to give you guidance, strength, and encouragement throughout your life.

However, there is a big difference between having God's Holy Spirit within you, and actually paying him any attention. That's why God instructs us to "be filled with the Holy Spirit". What does that mean? Well, being filled with the Holy Spirit is kind of like being filled with music. We can have music on in the background and completely ignore it. However, if we intently listen to the music, surrender to it, and allow it to fill us – the music will move us. We'll tap our feet, bob our heads, and even dance.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit we do sort of the same thing - we listen to him, we surrender to him, and allow him to fill us. When we do, the Holy Spirit will move us. But instead of tapping our toes our lives will produce peace, joy, love, kindness, patience, self-control and more!

He may even grant us special spiritual gifts to enable us to make a bigger and more positive impact in our world. Some will be able to pray with a special boldness, others will be able to be leaders, still others will be able to pray for the sick. These gifts are a wonderful new way to serve and experience God in our lives.

PURSUE YOUR DESTINY

Your life of following Jesus will be filled with adventure. As you learn and grow in your journey with God you will see wonderful changes in your life and in the lives of others. While you will face many challenges, and you'll mess things up many times, Jesus has promised to never leave you. The more we put our trust in him and follow his instructions, the better things will be!

