

The Six 'Get' Booklets

In Acts 2, right at the start of the first church in Jerusalem, we see several distinct things happening to the new believers: they **got born again** through repentance, they **got water baptised**, they **got filled with the Spirit**, and they **got joined to a local church**.

These booklets reflect these 4 vital early steps for the new believer, and the fifth one called **Get Gifted** takes us on into the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Although they work as 'stand alone' reads, Godfirst Church runs regular courses of different lengths based on each booklet.

Get Started: To help you get going as a new Christian.

Get Started Daily: 30 days of bible reading for the new believer.

Get Baptised: To help you get water baptised.

Get Connected: About the vision, values and membership of Godfirst Church.

Get Filled: To help you get filled with the Holy Spirit.

Get Gifted: To help you get going in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Other Resources by PJ

Healing: Biblical principles, practises and encouragement to pray for the sick.

Money Matters: Developing biblical attitudes and actions with finance.

The Sword: Learning how to understand, enjoy and apply the bible to our lives.

Relationships and Sexuality: A comprehensive look at relationships & sexuality.

Getting Ready for Marriage: To help you get ready for engagement or marriage.

Quick-Start Parenting: For parents who want the really important bits...and fast.

The World Needs More Apostles: Producing a new generation of apostles.

The World Needs More Elders: Producing a new generation of elders & leaders.

The World Needs More Preachers: Producing a new generation of preachers.

The World Needs More Small Group Leaders: Producing more small group leaders.

Please visit www.godfirst.co.za to download these resources

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Three ways to use this book

1. **By yourself:** reading this book by yourself and doing the ‘action’ section at the end of each chapter will work okay.
2. **With a mentor:** read a chapter per week and do the ‘action section’ at the end of the chapter, and then meet once a week with a more experienced Christian to chat about what you have read, ask questions, and discuss the ‘action’ steps.
3. **In a group:** read a chapter per week and do the ‘action section’ at the end of the chapter, and then meet once a week as a group to chat about what you have read, ask questions, and discuss the ‘action’ steps.

Everything is new

As you start out in your the Christian Race, so many things in your life have become new. The bible describes you as a “new creation”¹. In some ways you are already new, and in other ways you will gradually become new. Get Started will teach you about 7 new things that are now yours. The bible also describes you as a “new born babe”². Get Started will feed you “milk” (simple truths of the bible) that will cause you to grow strong in the early weeks of your walk with Jesus.

Don’t be discouraged

Don’t be discouraged if you are not yet *feeling* very new. When you drive through a border post into a new country, sometimes at first the landscape doesn’t look or feel very different. But as you progress it becomes clear that you are indeed in a new country. At the exact moment that you repented of your sin and invited Jesus into your life, you crossed the border into your new life. Your passport is already stamped “new life”, but you will experience the newness little by little.

¹ 2 Cor 5v17

² 1 Pet 2v2

CHAPTER 1

NEW LIFE

Goats & Sheep

Only two categories of people ever read this book. They are the same two categories of people that live on earth – those who have received the glorious new life of God, and those that haven't yet. When Jesus divided mankind into these two groups, he called them sheep & goats¹.

The aim of this first chapter is to convert goats into sheep. Exciting stuff – I mean you can start this Chapter off as a goat, and in a few minutes time be a sheep!

Then, the following 6 chapters aim to help sheep enjoy lives that are pumping with all the energy, joy and purpose that God intends. Here we go....

Man's problem

Today, the HIV AIDS virus is sweeping the globe. We are terrified of this killer disease. But there is another disease out there that makes AIDS look as serious as a sore toe. This is the killer disease called SIN. Not everyone has AIDS, but **everyone** has been born with the terminal disease of SIN. AIDS may destroy this life, but SIN will destroy you for **all eternity**. The bible teaches that all have sinned², and that the wage, or consequence, of our sin is death³. This means that while we are on earth our spiritual relationship with God is 'dead', and then when we die we will spend eternity in hell which is complete separation from God. Sin is devastating because it prevents us from having a relationship with God while on earth, and then it will separate us from God for all eternity.

God's solution

God is a **totally just** God. This means that He cannot change the rules and say, "Well actually, the consequence of sin need not be as severe as death". No. God hates sin so much that the only fitting consequence is death. And God will not budge on that one.

But He is also a **totally loving** God and does not want anyone to perish⁴. So, God devised a plan that would enable sinners like you and me to be saved – rather than die we can be saved forever. How would this happen?
It would happen by someone else taking our punishment of death for us....

¹ Mt 25v31 following

² Rms 3v23

³ Rms 6v23

⁴ 2 Pet 3v9

God's solution is substitution

"But he was pierced for our sins; he was crushed for our sins. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him" (Is 53v6)

Isn't that amazing! God laid the punishment that **you** deserve on Jesus. Jesus suffered the punishment of death in **your** place. Jesus died in **your** place for **your** sin. In his mercy God will allow your guilt and punishment to be transferred onto Jesus. You have a choice: either you can die for your own sin, or you can accept the fact that Jesus died in your place on the cross 2000 years ago. Romans 5v8 says "But this is how God demonstrates His love for us: while we were still sinners Christ died for us". Jesus took the consequence of your sin by dying on the cross.

Imagine the following courtroom scene

Jesus is the judge. You are the accused person charged with murder. You are found guilty by Jesus and sentenced to death. However, as soon as Jesus sentences you, He stands up and says *"But rather than you die for your crime, I will die in your place. The sentence will be carried out on me."* Now then, I can hear you thinking, "I don't deserve it, it isn't fair!" and you are absolutely correct. You don't deserve it! But herein lies the most important truth in the world. It is the truth of GRACE.

Grace is receiving from God what we do not deserve, and can never repay.

Salvation is an undeserved **gift** that can be either accepted or rejected. The bible teaches that being saved from death like this is actually a free **gift**¹ from God to you. You cannot earn a gift, can you? And like any gift, if you choose not to accept it then He won't force it on you. You can die if you like!! Are you getting the message? Salvation is a **free gift!** We don't deserve it, but we get it simply by saying, "Thank you Lord!". Once you accepted the forgiveness and Lordship of Jesus, you immediately become part of God's family.

Once in, can you ever be thrown out of God's family?

Ephesians 1v5 says you are **adopted into** God's family. John 3v3 says you are **born into** God's family. Whichever way you look at it you are now 100% part of God's family. And you can never be kicked out of this family, not even when you 'backslide' into sin. Let me explain this a little more:

¹ Rms 6v23

The bible says that you are “saved by grace, not by works”¹. This means that good works and bad works that you have done and will do in the future – none of them affect your salvation at all, whether for better or for worse. You salvation has nothing at all to do with you, remember! It is a free, undeserved gift. When Christ died for your sin, he died for the sins that you have committed already, and all the sins that you may still commit in the years ahead. And he was the recipient of the full wrath of God against your sin. God the Father is 100% satisfied with the death of Jesus; all His anger against sin buffeted Jesus andwait for it....you’re gonna love this bit... there is no more wrath of God remaining to land on you or your sin, past or present or future.

The difference between status and behaviour

Think about it: suppose that you ‘borrow’ your Dad’s car and then crash it, would you stop being his son? No! It is true that you haven’t behaved like a model son, but your status is still that of son. Biological laws eliminate the possibility of you ever losing your status of sonship. And if your Dad adopted you, then the adoption law expressly prohibits your parents disowning you as their son. No matter how you behave, you will always be your Dad’s son. You will want to say a big ‘sorry’, but you are still his son! And so it is with your heavenly ‘Dad’.

Consider this illustration about Prince William of England: Prince William is heir to the throne of England. Prince William’s status is that he is a prince. No one can take that away from him. Even though he may have days when he doesn’t act in a very princely way, he is still a prince. You see, although we don’t always act like holy Christians in our everyday lives, our status as forgiven, heaven-bound children of the King remains unchanged. So, you may rest secure knowing that neither your own sin nor the devil can ever take away your salvation. Your salvation was sealed by Christ’s death on the cross. Isn’t that wonderful! Look at these convincing words of Jesus:

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”
(Jn 10v28-30)

¹ Eph 2v8-9

Safe forever

From the moment that you receive the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life from God, He is your Father and heaven is your home and *nothing* can change that. You have a *new status* as a child of God. It is essential for you to be 100% sure of the new status for the following two reasons:

1. Because the devil always tries to cause a new Christian to doubt that they are really changed, and tries to make them believe that they are not really good enough to be a Christian.
2. Because this is the message of the gospel and you will need to know it well in order to tell other people about Jesus.

So how can I get born again?

*'If you **confess** with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved', says Rms 10v9. Therefore, you can do this by believing and praying the following prayer right now:*

"Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that you really are Lord. And I believe that that you died to take the punishment for my sins. I ask that you would wash me of all my sin, and come into my heart. Thank you that I am now your child and heaven is my home. Amen."

Water baptism – the symbol of your new status

Now that you are saved, you need to be baptised in water. Water Baptism is a wonderful thing. It is the outward sign of what has happened in your heart. Acts 2v38 makes it clear that the order of events is to first repent, *and then* be baptized, which is why infant baptism is incorrect – a little baby doesn't even know what day of the week it is, much less that it needs to repent! Water Baptism should happen soon after a person becomes a Christians, but not before. Here are five some reasons to be water baptised:

1. Because Jesus was baptised and told us to be also (Mt 3v16; Mt 28v19).
2. The disciples baptised people and said we should (Jn 4v1, Acts 2v38)).
3. Peter and John expected that all new believers would be baptised (Acts 8v16).
4. Philip endorsed it by baptising the Ethiopian (Acts 8v38).
5. Paul himself was baptised (Acts 9v18).
6. Paul expected that all believers had been baptised...and he made sure just in case they were not (Acts 19v1-5).
7. Paul and Peter often reference baptism in their theological writings, assuming that all believers had been water baptised (Rms 6v3; 1 Cor 1v13-17; 1 Cor 10v2; 1 Cor 12v13; 1 Cor 15v29; Gal 3v27; 1 Pet 3v20).

ACTION

1. Who has the problem of sin? (Rms 3v23)
 What is the wage of sin? (Rms 6v23)
 Is salvation a gift or do you have to earn it?.....
2. Have you received Jesus into your heart?.....If yes, when & where
 did that happen?.....
3. Have you been water baptized?.....If not, when is the next water
 baptism at your church that you could take part in?.....
4. On a scale of 1-10, how sure are you that you are a forgiven child of
 God? On a scale of 1-10, how sure are you that if you
 died tonight you would go to heaven?.....

*If you have an answer other than 10 for either question then read 1 John
 5v11-13 to convince you!*

CHAPTER 2

NEW POWER

Savedbut also filled with the Spirit

When John the Baptist first saw Jesus walking towards him, he exclaimed, “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*”¹ This was a reference to how, through the work of Christ on the cross, we can repent of our sin and be forgiven. But John also declared to the crowds that Jesus would also “*baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*”². In Chapter 1 we talked about what it means to repent and have our sin taken away by Jesus. This chapter is all about how to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

How exciting

You may have heard people talk about things like *being filled with the Spirit* and *the gifts of the Spirit*. You may have heard people speaking in tongues. You might be a little confused, but probably excited and intrigued! Furthermore, I bet that you have realised by now that it is one thing to get born again, but quite another to live a victorious Christian life. A victorious Christian life means that you are conquering sin little by little, telling others about Jesus, and generally being *victorious*! To live a victorious Christian life you need to be *full* of the Holy Spirit.

How important

It is impossible to over-state the importance of being baptised in the Holy Spirit! David Yongi Cho, the Pastor of the world’s largest church, has this to say: “*Without being full of the Holy Spirit the church today can never display God’s power as did the early church - a combative, challenging and victorious power to evangelise a generation.*”

But didn’t I receive the Holy Spirit when I was born again?

Yes, you did. The bible teaches that the Holy Spirit ‘renewed’ you³. However, being filled with the Holy Spirit (the same as baptized with the Holy Spirit) is a different issue. A little later, you might like to look at the following 3 stories in the book of Acts where we see Christians, just like you, who were *born again but not yet filled* with the Holy Spirit! And then, praise God, they did get filled!

¹ Jn 1v29

² Mt 3v11

³ Titus 3v5 & Jn 3v5

The Christians in Jerusalem:	Acts 2v1-4
The Christians in Samaria:	Acts 8v14-17
The Christians in Ephesus:	Acts 19v1-7

Six benefits of being filled with the Holy Spirit

1. Power to Witness: Do you lack wisdom and courage when it comes to sharing your faith with others? Jesus actually instructed his first disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they were baptised in the Holy Spirit, and *only then* go out preaching the gospel. The Holy Spirit will anoint you to effectively share your faith with others. In fact, Luke 24v49 says that being filled with the Holy Spirit means being “clothed with power from on high”. How about that!

2. Power to be obedient to God: Even though you are now a new creation, you have probably noticed that your ‘old self’, as well as the devil, work hard to stop you from obeying God. But do not despair, because Ezekiel 36v27 says “I will put my Spirit within you and *cause* you to walk in My ways”. The fullness of the Holy Spirit brings a change of heart, and a new desire and ability to live an upright and godly life.

3. Power to bear “good fruit”: As you know, the bible is fond of referring to Christians as trees. Paul explains to a church in Galatia that just as an apple tree bears apple-fruit, so a Christian tree should bear Christian-fruit. The nine fruit of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5v22-23. Whilst no fruit grows overnight, if you are full of the Holy Spirit this fruit will obviously grow stronger and faster in your life.

4. Power to use “spiritual gifts”: There are many different supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit that are mentioned in the bible. There is a whole range of gifts from prophesying and healing through to leadership and serving. These supernatural gifts are from God, given to strengthen and encourage and build up the church. It is God’s intention to give each Christian certain gifts that they can use to demonstrate the power and love of God to other people. Fullness of the Holy Spirit is essential in order to ‘flow’ in the gifts. Two passages that list a variety of spiritual gifts are 1 Cor 12v7-11 and Rms 12v6-8.

5. Increased intimacy with Jesus: In John 14v15-18, Jesus is speaking to His 12 disciples. Imagine how sad they must have been feeling, knowing that their best friend would soon be crucified and leave them forever. But here Jesus promises that he himself will come to them (in the form of the Holy Spirit) and dwell INSIDE them. You can’t get more intimate than that. Fullness of the Holy Spirit is about getting full of your best friend Jesus!

6. The ability to speak in tongues: In most instances in the bible where people are filled with the Holy Spirit, it is also recorded that they spoke in tongues. The 'package' of baptism of the Spirit includes the ability to speak in tongues – what a privilege! This ability to speak in tongues is different from the public gift of speaking in tongues which is spoken about in 1 Cor 12. All the gifts mentioned in 1 Cor 12 are gifts that benefit OTHER PEOPLE, whereas the gift of tongues that you receive when you are filled with the Holy Spirit is a personal gift to primarily be of benefit to yourself. Three passages that show people speaking in tongues when they got baptised in the Holy Spirit are Acts 2v4, Acts 10v44-48, Acts 19v5-6.

More about tongues

Tongues is simply a heavenly language to be used in prayer and worshipping God. Most of the time your mind will not understand what you are saying, but that is the whole idea because it is your spirit praying, *not your mind!* Tongues may sound rather strange to you at first and you may be tempted to think that you are 'just making it up'. But you are not. The strange sounds you are making are simply a vehicle for a meaning that the Holy Spirit attaches to them. Think about it for a moment: any foreign language sounds strange to someone who doesn't understand it, but that doesn't mean that it is not a proper language, or that the noises are not proper words! Here is a list of the benefits of speaking in tongues:

1. Tongues is evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit (Acts 2v4, Acts 10v44-48, Acts 19v5-6)
2. Tongues edifies us (charges the battery) and stimulates our faith (Jude v20, 1 Cor 14v4)
3. When we pray in tongues we are assured of praying in line with God's will (Rms 8v26,27)
4. Tongues assists us in our worship of God (Jn 4v23,24, 1 Cor 14v15,16,17)

So how can I receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues?

1. Pray now by yourself. Simply ask the Lord Jesus to fill you with his Holy Spirit and then start speaking in tongues.
2. Or, ask one of the leaders in your church to lay hands on you and pray with you to receive the Holy Spirit. As soon as he/she has finished the prayer, begin to speak in tongues. Just start speaking words and noises of any language that you don't know! *Yes, that really is tongues!* You are not making it up!
3. Go on the next **Get Filled** course in your church.

But *you* must move your mouth and make the noises

The most important thing to understand is that you have to do the speaking (just like normal speech) and the Holy Spirit converts the noises that you make into words with heavenly meaning. The more you speak in tongues, the more your 'heavenly vocabulary' will develop, and the more spontaneous it will feel.

One more thing

A wonderful truth is that although you are now filled with the Holy Spirit, you need to keep "be being filled". This does not mean that the Holy Spirit 'leaks away' little by little, it just means that God wants you to always know "new newness". The Holy Spirit is a river not a swamp. In a river, the water is always moving, always fresh, always new. Keep drinking in the Holy Spirit. Whether you are alone or with other Christians in a meeting, keep on drinking in the wonderful new newness of the Holy Spirit. Pray for yourself and others to know more of the Holy Spirit!

ACTION

1. Read Acts 2v38: what are the 3 steps that Peter says you need to take?

.....

2. Which of the 6 benefits of being filled with the Holy Spirit are you most excited about, and why?

.....

.....

.....

3. Have you been filled with the Spirit?..... If not, you may either pray the suggested prayer below now by yourself, or if you feel that you need someone to help you, ask another spirit-filled believer to pray for you to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

“Lord Jesus, thank you for the free gift of your Holy Spirit. I ask now that you would baptize me with your Spirit. Fill me until I am overflowing. I also thank you for all power, intimacy with you, and spiritual gifts that accompany the fullness of your Spirit. I ask that I would enjoy all of them. And Lord Jesus, thank you for the ability to speak in new tongues. Please help me as I do that now, Amen. (Now start speaking words and noises of any language that you don’t know. Yes, that really is tongues. You are not making it up!).

4. Do you speak in tongues? Sometimes people get baptized with the Spirit which is wonderful, but can struggle to get started in tongues. If you are a bit like that, don’t panic – you have got the main bit right! I suggest that you get another tongue-talking believer to re-read the relevant parts of this chapter with you, and then help you to get speaking in tongues. Go for it!

CHAPTER 3 NEW MISSION

Fishers of Men ... right from the start

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Jesus said, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men". At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mk 1v16-18)

...and this is just what happened to you too: when Jesus called you to follow him the next words out of his mouth were **"...and I will make you into someone who catches people for me"**! This is so exciting – we have been recruited into God's Team not just to sit on the side of the field and gradually become holy, but to get straight onto the field and score some gospel goals for him! It is so important that you understand that you have a new mission that starts the moment that you get born again. Look at this account of the apostle Paul's conversion:

*"Who are you, Lord?What do you want me to do?"
(Acts 9v5-6 NKJV)*

Paul understood that being a Christian was not only about all the wonderful blessings that God would bring to him, but that it was also about joining Jesus on **his mission** of seeing people saved.

His Mission is Our Mission

From the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God has been on an unrelenting mission to save people out of their sin. Jesus declared that he came to earth to "seek and save the lost"¹. In his three years of ministry, the first thing he did was to save his disciples, and the last thing he did before he died was help the thief on the cross get born again. Then before ascending to heaven, his last words to his followers were "...go and make disciples of all nations"². And now in heaven, rather than relaxing with his feet up being tickled by angels, he is earnestly praying that the lost would be saved³! Ok! Ok! I think we have got the message about our new mission!

¹ Lk 19v10; 1 Tim 1v15

² Mt 28v18-20

³ Heb 7v25

But how seriously should we take our new mission?

Please click your fingers ten times at a speed of one click per second. Have you done it? Here is the truth: every time you clicked your fingers someone died and went to hell. This is deadly serious. This is life-and-death. Jesus did not die on the cross so that we could give each other Easter eggs, but so that people can have their sins washed away and enjoy heaven instead of hell as their eternal home. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul uses the words *implore, persuade and urgent* to describe our passion for seeing people saved.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: *'Our great object of glorifying God is...to be mainly achieved by the winning of souls. We must see souls born unto God. If we do not, our cry should be that of Rachel 'Give me children or I die!' If we do not win souls, we should mourn as the farmer who sees no harvest, as the fisherman who returns to his cottage with an empty net, or as the huntsman who has in vain roamed over hill and dale'.¹*

Hudson Taylor wrote: *'Perhaps if there were more of that intense distress for souls that leads to tears, we should more frequently see the results we desire. Sometimes it may be that while we are complaining of the hardness of the hearts of those we are seeking to benefit, the hardness of our own hearts, and our own feeble apprehension of the solemn reality of eternal things, may be the true cause of our want of success.'²*

Charles Spurgeon also said: *"If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for."*

Fishing with success

There was once a young boy fishing with great success on the riverbank. On the other side of the river a laughing, noisy group of older boys were also fishing but catching nothing. After a while one of them shouted to the young boy, "How come you are catching fish and we aren't?" The young boy replied, "You are fishing for fun. I am fishing for fish".

Here are some fishing principles to help us fish with success:

¹ Spurgeon to Pastors

² A Retrospect, page 50-51

1. Understand that *fishing for souls* is a team effort

There are 3 players on our fishing team: firstly there is God, then there is you, and then there are other Christians who also help. Notice in the following verses that God is the *main player* in that he is making his appeal through us. We are representatives of Jesus, but he alone has the power to actually turn a heart towards himself. His role is to actually save the person, and ours to life and speak for him:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.’ (2 Cor 5:20)

Don't feel that it is impossible for your friend to get saved – it happened to you didn't it? So it can happen to them. Isn't it encouraging to know that all the power and desire of God is at work to save the people that we are fishing for! The mighty magnet of heaven is drawing them to God. Hallelujah!

2. Prayer

Praying for an unbeliever is the most important thing that you can do for them. Paul encourages us to pray that God would “open a door” so that people will receive the truth of the gospel¹. Prayer is the oil on the hinges of their heart. Prayer softens them and causes them to thirst for the truth of the gospel. William Cowper² said “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Saint upon his knees”. Your simple prayers are powerful.

3. Lifestyle

Our lifestyles are a powerful form of evangelism. If we fail to walk the talk the things we say hold no weight. If we don't practise what we preach then no one will be impressed. St. Francis made the point by saying “preach the gospel to all people, using words if necessary”! A preacher once said “it's not the message that is faulty, it's the advertising”! The advertising is you and me. Especially early on in our Christian walk our families and friends are all watching us to see if our new found faith is just a “phase” or whether it really is going to change us. A changed lifestyle is proof of true change! We are to live a godly lifestyle not just to please Jesus, but also as an advert for Christianity. Our lifestyles should be so different that they provoke people to ask questions.

On my first night at university I cleaned up the vomit of a drunken student at 2am. The next day his brother came to me to thank me and he asked why I did it. This led us into a conversation that caused him, his brother and a friend to commit their lives to Christ. Live it rather than speak it. Then because you are living it people will ask questions. Then you can speak it.

¹ Col 4v2-4

² A hero of the faith in the 16th Century

4. Salty speech

Matthew 5v13-16 says that you are salt! One of the things that salt does is make you thirsty. 'Salty Speech' is when a Christian skilfully brings God into everyday conversation. The effect of Salty Speech is to cause people to think more about God, and to provoke them to "thirst" and in due course ask questions. We all know that too much salt can be disgusting, so obviously you need to be careful not to "bleat" on and on about God, but rather to speak naturally in a way that intrigues people. Here are 2 examples of God-centred salty speech: When someone tells you of a problem, say "I'll be praying for that". When something good has happened to you, say "...and I'm so grateful to God."

5. Offering to pray for people

Imagine the following scene: you are at work with one of your non-Christian friends called Fred. He begins to tell you about an area of his life that is not going well. It may be a problem at home or work or with his health. Whatever the issue is, there are two ways that you could respond to this situation:

- Response 1: "Too bad, Fred. I hope it works out OK. See you later."
- Response 2: "That's tough, Fred. But listen, I have found it helpful to pray asking God for help in that kind of situation. Would you allow me to pray a quick prayer for you now?" At this point Fred will probably mutter something like, "Well I suppose it can't do any harm" at which point you say "Great. Let me pray a short prayer now". Then boldly launch into a short, simple prayer asking God to act on Fred's behalf in this situation. If the situation doesn't allow you to pray then and there, and then tell Fred that you "will be praying for him".

In Response 2 you seized the chance to share a bit of testimony and pray for Fred and this has now got Fred thinking. If God answers the prayer Fred will want to know more, but if Fred feels God didn't answer, then Fred will want to know why not! Either way you then have the chance to begin to talk to Fred about spiritual things. Seldom does a person refuse the offer of prayer.

Whenever a person is experiencing pain or trouble it is a GOLDEN opportunity for the gospel because they are desperate for help. C.S. Lewis described pain as the "megaphone that God uses to rouse a deaf world". Go for it. You will be amazed at the results.

6. Using the church community & church meetings

One of my favourite stories in the bible is found in Mark 2v1-5. It describes how it took a team of four friends to get a mutual friend to Jesus. The brilliance of church-life is that you can work as a team.

The church community: Jesus said “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”¹. Bringing your unsaved friends into your social group in the church will impact them, because they will sense and see the love of God amongst you. Also, once they have met a few of you and see that you are not too weird (!), they are more likely to be open to talking about spiritual things, and even coming along to a church meeting where they will hear the gospel explained.

Church Meetings: It is important that you are part of a church that is motivated and geared towards unbelievers, and whose meetings are relevant and attractive to unbelievers. Remember, first & foremost a church is a fishing team. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul speaks about the church as a body made up of different parts. You may be a very good “ear” (good at listening to and caring for people) but you might not be a very good “mouth” (good at actually explaining the gospel). No problem, because we can work as a team; bring them along to a church meeting where the preacher can be the “mouth” for you. Let’s work as a team.

7. Testimony

Testimony means, “to bear witness to”. You are now able to “bear witness to” what Jesus has done for you, and the wonderful thing is that no one can dispute it with you. The most convincing adverts on TV are those when a well-known personality stands up and says, “I use this product and it works for me”. To those who know you, you are a well-known personality. Your ‘advert’ is so powerful because it is you telling people that God really works today in a real world in your real life! 1 Peter 3v15 says, “*Be always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you*”. The Royal National Lifeboat Institute’s motto is “Semper Paratus” meaning “Always Prepared” - this is now your motto and it is time to get prepared so make sure that you do the action section at the end of this chapter.

8. Explaining the gospel message yourself

This is the first prize; there is nothing more exciting than actually ‘clinching the deal’ yourself! The aim of these previous 7 fishing techniques has been to actually get the fish on the hook, and when the fish is on the hook then someone (either you or a preacher in a church meeting) needs to simply and clearly explain the gospel message to them, and lead them in a simple prayer of salvation.

Here are a few verses that you can show to anyone in about 3 minutes. They clearly explain the gospel message and bring them to the point of praying the prayer of salvation. Until you know it off-by-heart, it might be a good idea to photocopy the next page and keep it in your pocket so that you take it out and talk a person through it:

¹ Jn 13v34

“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rms 3v23)

- Explain that they are a sinner.

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus” (Rms 6v23)

- Explain that the consequence of sin is death. “Death” means spiritual death in this life because we can’t have a relationship with God, and eternal separation in hell from God when we die.
- But ... God wants to give us the gift of eternal life. This gift comes ‘in’ Jesus. Therefore, if a person receives Jesus into their life they also receive eternal life.

“Yet to all who received Him ... He gave the right to become children of God” (Jn 1v12)

- Explain that if they receive Christ into their life they will immediately become a child of God. God is their Father and they can enjoy a relationship in this life with Him, and then when they die they can continue this relationship with Him in heaven forever. But they have a choice to make: read on to find out about that....

“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in” (Rev 3v20)

- Explain that they have a choice whether to receive or reject Jesus. Salvation is free but not automatic. They must “open the door” of their life to Christ. Explain that they can receive Jesus by wholeheartedly **believing** and praying a simple prayer like this:

“Dear Lord Jesus, I admit I am sinner and I repent of my sin. Please wash me of my sin and come into my heart. I believe that you are Lord and I receive you into my life. Thank you that I am now your child and heaven is my home. Amen.”

**Now, to get them going in their Christian walk, you need to start doing
Get Started with them.**

ACTION

1. Write down the name(s) of the person(s) who played a part in your salvation

2. Write down a list of people who are close to you that do not yet know Jesus. Keep this list in with your daily bible reading notes. Pray daily for their salvation and develop a fishing strategy for them.

3. Practise explaining the outline of verses on the previous page so that you are ready at anytime to share the gospel with someone in a concise and clear manner.

4. Now for your testimony: fill in this table, and then practise saying it until you have got it down to about 1-minute, and then you are ready at anytime to share this with a person.

2 aspects of your life before coming to Christ
Some key thoughts and events leading to the decision
2 things that Jesus has done in your life since your conversion

CHAPTER 4

NEW APPOINTMENT

Friends spend time together

And best friends spend lots of time together. Jesus' 12 disciples were first and foremost His friends, and in John 15v15, Jesus specifically says that you are not His servant, but His friend. What wonderful news! Whilst it is true that Jesus never leaves us and we can talk to Him 24 hrs a day, the bible encourages us to set aside regular alone time with God. In fact, most Christians try to have a special time each day to be alone with God. Obviously, the more time you spend alone with Jesus, the deeper and stronger your relationship with Him will be.

When?

The answer is whatever time works best for you. Fortunately God is awake and available all the time, so He will fit in with you! The preference of most Christians is to try and follow the example of King David¹ and Jesus² to meet with God right at the start of the day. It certainly makes good sense to sharpen your sword before going into battle, and it can be risky leaving it until later in the day because it can get squeezed out so easily. Whatever time of day you choose, try and use the same time and place each day so that it becomes a part of your routine. In the busy lives that we lead, we need to be ruthless in setting quality time aside for our important relationships, and no relationship is more important than with Jesus.

Where?

Mark 1v35 records that Jesus chose a "solitary place" to spend time alone with His heavenly Father. Try and find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.

How long?

The largest living animal is the Rorqual, or Blue Whale. It is 30m long and weighs over 120 tonnes. It is longer than 10 elephants and as heavy as 20. But did you know that it feeds regularly on tiny shrimps? To grow big and strong, your daily appointment doesn't need to be long, but it does need to be regular. It is usually better to have smaller, daily meals rather than a binge once a week. You will probably start off by spending just a few minutes each day reading and praying, and then as the days go by you may well find that you need more and more time with Jesus.

¹ Ps 5v3

² Mk 1v35

How?

When you meet with your best human friend I doubt you have a set programme that you follow. It is the same with your New Appointment with Jesus - there is no set format. You are not doing a religious ritual, but rather you are spending relational time with your friend. During your daily appointment, you talk to God through prayer, and God talks to you through the bible and also through thoughts and pictures and feelings that He will drop into your mind.

Praying

Prayer is easy and fun. The best way to learn how to pray is to pray. Just remember to talk normally to God. Don't change the way you normally speak or the words you normally use. Don't suddenly start saying "thou" instead of "you". Don't feel that you need to throw in the odd Latin word. None of these things will make you a better pray-er or impress God. You impress Him already! He has completely accepted you just as you are and wants to be your best friend, and isn't the best thing about best friends that you can always be yourself when you talk to them? Prayer is TALKING to Jesus. Simple.

Reading the bible

Many people like to use bible notes (available in Christian Bookshops) which suggest a different passage to read each day, and also help you understand what the passage means. Alternatively, you can work your way through a book by reading a chapter per day. To help you get going, may I share with you the way that I usually have my daily appointment with Jesus?

1. Start with a time of thanks and praise

I find it wonderful to start with several minutes of up-beat thanks and praise, which always brings a sense of closeness to God. We see this principle in Psalms where David says, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise"¹ and "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"². Praise means to tell God how great he is. Thanksgiving means to deliberately remember and thank God for all he has done for you. Some days you will spill over with adoration and thanksgiving, and on other days you may like to use some verses in the bible to help focus your praise and thanks. Many of the psalms are good for this. In fact, I have found that using bible verses to launch my prayers of thanks and praise is a mighty, mighty key to knowing God more, drawing closer to him in prayer, and praying for much longer!

¹ Ps 100v4

² Ps 103v2

2. Then move into a time of reading the bible

Now it is time to read the bible. You might be using bible notes, or you might be simply working your way through a book of the bible reading a chapter or so each day. Whichever way you are doing it, once you have read the passage, the key question to ask is “**how does this apply to me?**” And suddenly the bible becomes relevant to our own lives! How exciting! Some days you will find that God will speak to you very clearly about specific things in your life, and bible truths will seem to leap out at you. Other days you will find that God speaks to you in a more general way. Actually, this is just like any friendship. Sometimes you talk about very relevant and meaningful things, but a lot of the time you just chat!

3. Then end with a time of request prayers

You will probably want to start by thanking him for the things you have just learned from the bible, and to pray into the application for your life. Also, confess and repent any areas of sin in your life that have come to mind. But it is then important to spend some time praying for your day ahead, for your family, friends, home, and church. Pray that God would break into the lives of your friends and family who do not yet know Jesus. Pray also for your own needs. Then go and have a great day walking close to Jesus!

One last thing

Even with the best intentions in the world, you will experience periods when you miss your daily appointment with Jesus. Don't feel guilty. Don't feel guilty. Don't feel guilty. Jesus is not scolding you for missing these times with Him, but He is certainly looking forward to meeting one-on-one with you again soon. What a wonderful friend He is; his love for you is unconditional!

ACTION

1. John 15v15: According to this verse, I am aof Jesus.
2. Mark 1v35 and Psalm 5v3: According to these verses, what time of day did Jesus and David have their daily appointments with God?What time of day do you think might be the best time for your daily appointment?
3. Mark 1v35: According to this verse, where did Jesus go to be alone with God? Where would be a good place for you to have your daily appointment?
4. Have you got some bible reading notes, or will you simply work your way through a book of the bible?

CHAPTER 5

NEW FAMILY

Every baby Christian must be added to a family of Christians

The bible describes a new Christian as a “new born baby”¹. The main thing a baby needs is a family. Babies without families die. Amidst all the excitement of that day in Acts 2 when 3000 new ‘babies’ were born, I suspect that Peter and his friends had a bit of a panic attack about how they would look after 3000 brand new babies! How did they ensure that all these brand new converts would develop into mature Christian men and women? Here’s the answer:

*“...and 3000 were **added** to their number that day” (Acts 2v41)*

God’s plan is that every new Christian is **not only saved** by the Lord, **but also added** to a Christian family. These families are called **churches**.

Being a member of a local church is essential

King David was fond of describing Christians as ‘trees’. In Psalm 92v13 he explains that each tree should be planted “*in the house of the Lord*”, as opposed to being planted all by themselves out in the desert somewhere. We are designed to grow in “forests” along with other trees. David goes on to say that Christians planted in God’s House will be “*majestic and stable and upright and durable and useful and fruitful*”². If you want to be that kind of tree, then join a church that loves God, who love each other, love the bible, love the work of the Holy Spirit, and love those who do not yet know Jesus.

What is the church?

Church is not a building or a place. Church is not a meeting or an event. So what is it? The following verses present give a superb definition of the church:

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a **people** belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world ... to live such good lives amongst the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God” (1 Peter 2v9-12)*

¹ 1 Peter 2v2

² Ps 92v13 Amplified translation

These verses teach us the following 3 things:

1. **We are a new community of people on earth.** Before we had received God's mercy (i.e. before we had got born again) we were just part of the pagan community on the earth (everyone who has not been born again). But now the thing that unites us is that we have all received God's mercy.
2. **We belong to God.** God has always wanted a people. Just as Israel was God's special people up until the time that Jesus came to earth, so now the church is the New People of God on the earth. And actually, since heaven is our proper home now not earth, it is as if we are *aliens* on earth! We are just passing through earth on our way to our home in heaven.
3. **We exist to praise God through the way we live, in order to draw others into this New Community of born again people.** We live differently. Our church communities are a radical alternative to the selfish, godless communities of earth. Local churches are meant to be bright shining communities of love and light¹.

Terry Virgo, who leads the New Frontiers family of churches, speaks of a local church as ***“a spirit-filled community of believers who are deeply excited about Jesus, and determined not only to love the Lord and one another, but also to reach out to the community and win the lost.”***

Bill Hybels, who leads the Willow Creek Association of Churches, speaks of a local church as ***“a community of people who are radically devoted to Christ, irrevocably committed to each other, and relentlessly dedicated to reaching those outside God's family with the gospel of Christ. The church is an unstoppable force for good in the community and a testimony to God's unfailing grace.”***

How important is the church?

The church is the most important thing in the world. It is the reason for all creation. The only thing that will last forever are the souls of people, and for all eternity the community of God will be in heaven with Jesus². Jesus lived and died for the church³. We should too. I am so proud to be involved with churches full of people who have settled once and for all that the local church is the most important thing on earth, and hardly surprisingly these churches are beginning to make the kind of staggering impact in their communities that the early church did in the book of Acts.

The bible describes the church as a body, a family and an army. Let's look a little closer at several of these images now:

¹ Mt 5v14-16

² Rev 21v1-4

³ Eph 5v25

What a body!

Although Jesus is no longer physically on the earth, *we are*. And we are *His body*. This means that God is present in the earth, and speaks and acts *through us*. This body has many different parts that, whilst are *all equally important*, play different roles. You may not be a very good mouth, but you may be an excellent ear. You may be a solid 'spine' who is rarely in the limelight but who is always an anchor for others. Even as a new member of the body, make it your aim, as soon as possible, to get *playing your part* and helping out with the responsibilities in your Small Group and maybe other areas too. You have so much to give. Get giving.

What a Family!

As a Christian you will *always* need a church family, but probably never as badly as when you are a new baby Christian. Babies desperately need the influence and protection of people who love them. Babies can't drink milk by themselves, and have to depend on others for their feeding. This is why your involvement with someone who is discipling you is critical to your growth. You need to rely on those who are more mature to feed you. They don't expect you to know it all or be perfect - no baby is, and in fact no adult is either! You are allowed to make mistakes and no one will smack you. Your new family is patient and caring. Isn't it wonderful to have so many new brothers and sisters! No matter how large or small, a local church should feel and act like a family. But just like any family, you can't choose who else is in it! However, because we are a family we go out of our way to ensure that everyone *feels 'at home'* and completely accepted and loved. We are patient and persevering with one another. We care for and protect one another.

What an army!

In Matthew 28v18-20 Jesus instructs those who follow Him to "Go into all the world and make disciples". These verses are what we call '*The Great Commission*' because it is here that we are given our MISSION! There is a great deal of 'military talk' in the New Testament including references to "fighting the good fight of faith" and to wearing the "armour of God" and to being "good soldiers of Christ Jesus". If we were just a family we would be very good at *caring for each other* but not very good at *winning the lost* to Christ. If we were just an army then we would be very organized and efficient and courageous but we might not be very loving! We must be both. Just as an army has leaders, so will your church. Just as a soldier must be diligent and committed to the cause, so should you endeavour to be.

ACTION

1. Read Acts 2v40-47. Look closely at verses 41 and 47. Apart from being saved, what else is necessary for a Christian in relation to the community of believers?
 2. Read Ps 92v12-14. In what place do 'trees' flourish and grow strong?
 3. According to 1 Peter 2v5, is the church a physical building made of stones & bricks & cement?.....
If not, what is it made of?.....
 4. What gifts and abilities do you have that could be used to strengthen the body?
 5. Are you a committed member of a local church that is loves the bible, the Spirit, and the lost?
- If not, what is your plan to remedy that?
-
-

CHAPTER 6

A NEW FIGHT

A new enemy

One of the new things that you receive when you surrender your life to Christ is a new enemy. In fact, Satan has always been your enemy - but now things are official! The moment you were born again, you moved your allegiance from Satan to Jesus, and the following verse declares the state of war:

Satan comes only to steal, kill and destroy. But I (Jesus) have come that you may have life to the full (Jn 10v10)

Now that you are born again, Satan has failed in his *Plan A* of taking you to hell, so he reluctantly switches to *Plan B* - to hinder you from living an enjoyable and effective new life in Jesus. The bible teaches that Satan has two primary weapons that he uses against you:

Weapon One: Guilt

One of the things that Satan does is accuse Christians by reminding them night and day that they are not doing very well as Christians. He is an expert at wielding the weapon of guilt and it is vital that we know how to combat him in this area. Remember that on the cross Jesus took the guilt and shame and punishment of death – he took all God’s wrath – for every sin that you have committed and that you will commit. Jesus has been blamed and punished for all your sin. All the guilt was taken by him. You have been given the righteousness of Jesus. You have been 100% justified. So, when the devil makes you feel guilty and condemned, remind yourself (& the devil!) of these three mighty verses:

God made Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5v21)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rms 8v1)

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. (Rms 8v33)

Weapon Two: Temptation

*“Cast off the sin that so easily entangles and run the race...”
(Heb 12v1)*

As you run your new Christian race Satan is out to hinder you with sin, and rather annoyingly he has another accomplice who works with him to tempt you – your **flesh**¹. Your *flesh* refers to your *old self* that has not been born again, only your spirit was born again, so of course your *old self* has no desire to live for God. The good news is that you will get a brand new body when you go to heaven², but the bad news is that until then you will find that you constantly need to keep your fleshly desires under control. But here comes the really good news:

You can never actually be forced to sin

Despite all his power, the bible is crystal clear that neither **Satan** (nor your **flesh**) can ever actually force you to sin. See for yourself:

And God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Cor 10v13)

Samuel Plimsoll was a British Member of Parliament who spent all his life working for better conditions for seamen. He was concerned about the number of sailors who drowned at sea because the ships they sailed in were overloaded and in a bad state of repair. His efforts resulted in the introduction of the Plimsoll Line in 1876. This is the mark on the side of every ship that shows the level in the water to which a ship can be safely loaded. God has set a Plimsoll line on each of us and He will never allow the devil to overload us with temptation that we cannot bear. Hallelujah!

Is it a sin to be tempted?

No, but giving in to temptation of course leads to sin. Here is my first (and my wife thinks should probably be my last) attempt at poetry:

*“When temptation comes into your mind to rest,
quickly chase it out, before it can build a nest”*

Remember that God never tempts us. James 1v2-4 explains that God allows the devil to tempt us that we might grow strong, mature and resilient to the attacks of the enemy.

¹ Rms 6v11-14; James 1v14

² Phil 3v20-21; 1 Cor 15v51-52

Beware: sugar-coated poison

A temptation would not be a temptation if it did not hold the promise of some pleasure, but it is *always* short-lived temporary pleasure. Satan always presents sin to us in a very tasty package, but don't be fooled: sin might taste good for a few minutes, but it soon turns bitter and will always harm you.

Ten defences for victory over temptation

1. Be self-controlled

*“Be **self-controlled** and **alert**. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5v8-9)*

Self-control is vital. You see, although Satan can tempt you to sin, for temptation to be converted to actual sin, it needs to borrow a part of your body. For example, when you are tempted to think jealous or proud or lustful or angry thoughts, sin can only actually happen if you surrender the instrument of your mind to sin to use. Also, don't let sin borrow your eyes to look at things that you shouldn't. Don't do that! Be self-controlled! Look what Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness ... but rather offer the parts of your body to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rms 6v13)

2. Be alert

Two weeks before writing this I was visiting Johannesburg Zoo. When we were at the lion enclosure, my friend Hugh told me of how in some parts of Africa, people attach human-looking face masks to the backs of their heads as a deterrent to a lion-attack. Apparently, a lion prefers to attack an unsuspecting victim from behind, but with the mask on, the person looks alert from the front and the back! Let us be similarly vigilant knowing that Satan is ready to pounce if we let our guard down. And he never plays fair - standard military tactics are to attack the enemy between 3am and 5am, because this is when the human 'body clock' is in its slowest mode. Satan will almost always attack you with temptation when you are in a weak and vulnerable state.

3. Learn how to run

*And although Potiphar's wife spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he **went into the house** to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants were inside. She caught him by his cloak and said “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and **ran out of the house** (Gen 39v11-12)*

Joseph did one thing wrong and one thing right. The right thing was that he ran away right at the start of the temptation before it got a hold of him. When you battle temptation, unlike military warfare or sport, if you run away you win! Don't try to be a hero, just run. If you run, in this battle you are a hero!

4. Avoid places of temptation

The wrong thing Joseph did was to foolishly go into the house alone with Potiphar's wife. Interestingly, Proverbs 7v6-9 tells a similar story of a young man who walked passed the house of a prostitute, and the writer is quick to call this young man foolish! If you are tempted to steal jewellery, don't go near jewellery shops! The best drivers are not the ones who show off how clever they are by driving fast near the edge of the cliff, but rather those who avoid the cliff by many metres. Don't even hang around people or places that may tempt you to sin.

5. Starve the flesh and feed the spirit

Once a man had two dogs that he fought against each other on every Saturday in the market place. He would take bets as to whether the black dog or the brown dog would win. Each week a different dog won and the man made much money because he always seemed to know which of his dogs would win. One day a friend asked him "how do you always know which dog will win on Saturday?" The dog owner replied "The dog I feed the most during that week always wins on Saturday."

Feed the "Spirit dog" in you by prayer, bible reading and fellowship with other Christians. Starve the "flesh dog" in you by only reading and watching things that are good for you.

6. Stay busy for God

King David was a great warrior for much of his life, but there was one year when he got lazy and instead of leading his army on a campaign, he delegated that to a general, and David stayed at home, no doubt lazy and bored around the palace. It was then that he got tempted and committed adultery with Bathsheba. What can we learn from this? That a committed lifestyle of serving God will keep you occupied (both in your time and your affections) with godly, exciting things. Righteousness will be more attractive to you than sin! Someone once said, "Some temptations attack the busy person, but all attack the idle person".

7. Be ruthless with little sins

Oliver Cromwell once went to the circus and witnessed a tragedy: one act included a huge python which wrapped itself around a standing man, and then uncoiled itself and slithered back to it's box. That night it all went wrong: instead of releasing the man, the snake crushed him to death in front of a shocked audience. This python had been trained from birth – when it was a small, weak baby snake, but it grew into a monster. James 1v13-15 speaks

of the subtle growth of small temptations into mighty sins that can destroy you. Little, cuddly lions become big lions and big lions eat people! Ruthlessly put to death small sins in your life or else they will quickly grow to become habits that entangle you.

8. Know some key verses of the bible

When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert¹, it is interesting that Jesus responded to each temptation by quoting verses from the bible, saying “It is written...” The psalmist believed in the same defence strategy because he said *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you”*². Being familiar with some of the things that the mighty word of God says about certain sins is a mighty defence against attacks of temptation. Here are a couple of my favourite anti-temptation-defence-scripture-missiles:

Against stinking thinking:

“Finally brothers, whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praise-worthy, think on such things”
(Phil 4v8)

“Set your mind on things above and not on earthly things”
(Col 3v2)

“And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”
(2 Cor 10v5)

Against worrying

“My God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4v19)

9. Stay accountable to others

Paul wanted his friends in Corinth to understand that *“no temptation had seized them except that which was common to man”*³, and James encourages us to talk to other suitable Christians about sins that we are struggling with⁴. What a relief to know that others experience the same battles, and that we can confess our failings and struggles to others who can sympathise (not criticise!) and then spur us on to righteousness! It is good for each of us to have at least one other mature Christian that we can regularly chat to about our struggles.

¹ Luke Chapter 4

² Ps 119v11

³ 1 Cor 10v13. See also 1 Peter 5v9.

⁴ James 5v16

10. When you fail run to God immediately

Here is one of my favourite scriptures:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in everyway just as we are, yet was without sin. Therefore, let us boldly approach the throne of grace to find help in our time of need (Heb 4v15)

Jesus understands your struggles. He has been there, done that, and won through! He is qualified to help you out! So, if you give in to temptation, turn straight to Jesus and say, “Jesus, I am so sorry to have sinned. I ask now that you would forgive me and wash me of this sin. Thank you that you never stop loving me even when I mess up. Amen.” And **do not, repeat not, repeat not** listen to any condemning accusations from Satan, because he always wants to use Weapon Number 1 (guilt) against you whenever you mess up. Remember that on the cross Jesus took the guilt and shame and punishment of death – he took all God’s wrath – for every sin that you have committed and that you will commit. It has all been paid for! Tell the devil, “Satan, although I sinned, I am still 100% holy before God. I am holy, without blemish and free from accusation¹. You have nothing to accuse me of because Jesus was already accused for that sin I just committed.”

Stronghold sins

The final thing to say about temptations is that the bible mentions ‘stronghold sins’². Most Christians find that there are one or two areas of temptation that seem stronger for them than others. For some people it might be fear or jealousy, for others addictions of some sort, and maybe for others pornography. These are called “stronghold sins” simply because they seem to have an extra strong hold on you. Strongholds develop in different ways. Sometimes they develop by doing a certain sin so much for so long, or sometimes they develop simply because you seem especially weak in that area.

My experience with dealing with stronghold sins is that it is important to get one or two trusted friends to pray with you into this area. Matthew 18v18-19 tells us that prayers have special power when they are prayed in agreement with another Christian. Combined prayer is very powerful! To overcome most sins we can pray by ourselves, but to tear down stronghold sins we need to pray with someone else.

Once you have prayed together for special strength to combat this sin, you must then live a disciplined and alert lifestyle to stay free from it. And your trusted friends should keep you in their prayers, and from time to time ask you how you are doing in this area (see point 9 above).

¹ Col 1v22

² 2 Cor 10v4

ACTION

Carefully and honestly fill in the table.

	On a scale of 1 to 10, how well am I doing in each area of defence?	What practical action step can I take to improve my defence in this area?
1. Be self-controlled		
2. Be alert		
3. Learn how to run		
4. Avoid places of temptation		
5. Starve the flesh & feed the spirit		
6. Stay busy for God		
7. Be ruthless with little sins		
8. Know some key verses in the bible		
9. Stay accountable to others		
10. When you fail run immediately to God		
Stronghold sins		

CHAPTER 7

NEW ATTITUDE TO MONEY

PART A: MONEY: A CRITICAL AREA

Although there are just over 200 verses in the bible on faith, about the same number on salvation, there are over 2 300 references to finance. I think that there are three reasons for this strong biblical emphasis on money:

Reason 1: Because money is central to life

In one way or another, finance and economics occupies much of our waking moments. It affects practically everything in our lives. Most homes would regard themselves as being under some kind of financial strain. Today, 50% of divorces in the USA are attributed to financial stress in one from or another. A survey in USA, RSA and Europe of 470 000 people from every different financial background were asked the question, 'how much do you need to live comfortably'? Almost everybody responded "about 10% more than we currently have". Interesting.

Reason 2: Because 'Mammon' is a powerful demonic force

In Luke 16 Jesus gives money the status of a Contender God saying that if we do not break free and stay free from the power of money then he will never be able to trust us with greater responsibility. Jesus used the ancient Aramaic word 'Mammon' to denote an entity that exists in the heavenly realm, which people had worshipped as their god of finance. Also, in the parable of the sower Jesus describes the demonic power behind money as 'thorns' sent to choke us with worry and the deceitfulness of wealth (Mt 13v22). The world we live in is aggressive in trying to recruit us to serve Mammon. A singer called 50c recently produced an album *Get rich or die trying* – that about sums it up. So, the question here is 'who will rule and reign in your heart?' The human heart is only big enough for one God: will it be Jesus or Money?

Reason 3: Because God's rule needs to extend to all parts of our lives

After his baptism, Samuel Houston (after whom Houston, Texas was named) stated that he would like to pay half the pastor's salary saying, 'My wallet got baptised along with the rest of me'.

PART B: TEN WAYS TO EXCEL IN GIVING

But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and your love for us – see also that you excel in this grace of giving (2 Cor 8v7).

1. Give to constantly choose God over Mammon

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Lk 16v13). Jesus speaks straight about this: he gives money a capital 'M' and says, point blank, that Money and all it represents, contends with him for the throne of your life. Mammon is not the same thing as money, rather it is the spirit behind money. As with most demonic activities, the assault is one of deception...it tells us that a little more money will make us happier, that we need just a few more possessions to be satisfied, and that having more money or possessions will make us more popular and more powerful. It tells you that your net worth as an individual is based on your net wealth. The primary tactic of mammon is to entice people into serving him without realising that they are actually doing so. And, wait for it, **the only way to defeat Mammon is to consistently give money away.**

2. Give so that God can entrust you with greater responsibility

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? (Lk 16v10-12). The correct handling of money is imperative before God will entrust you with true riches. I have never met a person who is being significantly used by God who has not first lined up his handling of money with what the bible teaches. And sadly, I know people who would burst into enjoyment in God and a fruitful life if only they would submit to God's ways in the realm of finance.

3. Beware 'sneering' when you are provoked to give

The Pharisees, who love money, heard this and were sneering at Jesus (Lk 16v14). If you get twitchy when you are provoked to give away money and be generous, it might indicate that you are actually more attached to money than you think you are.

4. Give to stay free from the love of money

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim 6v9-10). Note that money is not the problem, rather the love of money is. Giving money away to God in a regular, generous and cheerful manner is the sure way to 'fall out of love' with money.

5. Give to get

Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously (2 Cor 9v6). Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure that you use it will be measured back to you (Lk 6v38). God has set a law in place in the universe called 'sowing and reaping'. This happens rather obviously when a farmer sows seed, but also happens when a Christian 'sows' his money. God says that he will organise that this person receives a decent 'return' on what they sowed. How wonderful! Not only do we give in order to stay free from the dangers of love for money and reliance on money, but we also get more of it...to give more...to get more...to give more...and along the way all this giving keeps us gloriously free from the snares of Mammon. Remember that God is not in need of your money, rather he wants you to keep giving to ensure that money never becomes your master. And then, he is delighted to supernaturally return to you *more* than you gave.

There was a man, some called him mad. The more he gave the more he had (John Bunyan).

6. Give in order to invest in the future

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven..." (Mt 6v19-20). Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life (1 Tim 6v17-19).

How interesting: God has no problem with us 'hoarding' up treasure for ourselves...so long as it is in the right place – in heaven not on earth. Imagine that you lived in England and you were 20 years old, but that you planned to retire at the age of 60 by the sea in Spain. The laws of Spain stipulated that you could not bring any money into Spain with you when you arrived, or at any time after your arrival. But that **before you arrived** you could deposit a maximum of 100pounds per month into your Spanish bank account. What would you do? I expect that you would diligently send your

100 pounds through every month for 40 years so that you had enough to retire on. God encourages us to do the same for heaven. Although the bible doesn't tell us everything about heaven, it does tell us that we can store up blessings for ourselves in advance.

You can't take anything with you but you can send it on ahead.

7. Giving is more about how much we keep than how much we give

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Lk 21v1-4). Because wealth is relative, this principle 'levels the playing field' for all of us by making giving an issue of proportion rather than amount. The issue is not so much the amount that we give, but rather the amount of faith and trust in God that is represented by the amount that we give. God's interest seems to be more in how much we keep than how much we give.

8. Give so that you feel it

But King David replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Sam 24v24).

9. Give 'beyond' your ability

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints (2 Cor 8v1-4). What a great attitude! They saw giving as a privilege to contend for and they even gave 'beyond' their ability. The issue here is one of *faith*. Give to the point where you need to trust God to help you to come out right at the end of each month. What a thrilling way to live.

10. Give from a place of contentment

*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be **content** with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Heb 13v5-6).* *Godliness with **contentment** is great gain (1 Tim 6v6).* The world system works to make us discontent with what we have so that we will buy more and more. In contrast to this, God urges us to get content with what we have and not be continually running after more and more (Mt 6v32). A practical way to do this is to work out what you need to live at the level that you feel is right, and then 'close the loop' so that extra income can be given away rather than absorbed into expenditure on more and more.

PART C: HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE AWAY?

After reading Part B immediately before this section, you have probably realised that the only answer to this question is 'give as much as you can as regularly as you can'! Giving is a privilege: we don't have to give, rather we get to give. Lucky us. As we give money we get more money. As we give we stay free from the snares of money. And as we give we can forward the advance of the wonderful gospel. It is pretty hard to find any drawbacks when it comes to giving!

Having said that, allow me to recommend to you the principle (not law) of the tithe that I have found to be such a great help in getting me into the swing of joyful and generous giving, and then keeping me in the swing of it:

The Tithe in the Old Testament was a Law

In the Old Testament era, people related to God mainly through rule keeping. They had a comprehensive list of laws from God that included the law of the Tithe stipulating that the first 10% of all of your increase / income belonged to God, and needed to be given to him or else you were robbing God and would come under a curse (Malachi 3v6f).

But we are no longer under the Law

Since Jesus came, we no longer relate to God by rule keeping, because Jesus has given us his perfect righteousness as a gift (Eph 2v8-9). We are righteous because Christ has made us righteous not because we do good things. So, we are certainly no longer subject to the law of the tithe.

But before you throw out the tithe completely...

It is interesting to note that tithing was *voluntarily* practiced by Abraham¹, and *voluntarily* practised by Jacob² long before it was made an official law for Israel³. These great men of God obviously felt that the practice of giving 10% to God was a helpful way to approach giving.

It is also interesting that when Jesus had the chance to dismiss tithing altogether....he didn't take it, in fact he seemed to affirm it to some degree, although the point that he was making was more to do with heart-attitude rather than outward rule keeping (Mt 23v23).

¹ Gen 14v20

² Gen 28v22

³ Lev 27v30-34

So where does this leave us today?

Today, the tithe is not a law, but it can be a very helpful guiding principle to get us started in our exciting venture of giving. Here are my reasons:

1. I follow the principle of the tithe because it proves grace more powerful than law.

We now relate to God through his grace not our works. To put it another way, *we are not saved or kept saved by works* (doing things or keeping laws), but we are saved and kept saved only by God's work of grace¹.

But significantly, grace hasn't been given to us to lower the bar, but rather to raise it. Our new motivation of grace propels us to greater works than we could ever do under law. For example, Jesus said that the law tells us not to commit murder, and then says that now even murderous thoughts count as murder (Mt 5v21). The bar is raised. Paul goes on to explain more of the powerful and positive impact that grace has upon us:

"His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God that was in me" (1 Cor 15v10).

"Grace teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age ...eager to do what is good (Titus 2v11-14).

Here is my point: Like Abraham and Jacob, we are also free from the law – we live in the age of the inner motivation of grace, but wouldn't it be a slap in the face for grace to come in lower than 10% and thus prove law to be more effective than grace? The last thing I want to do is to put you back under law, rather I want to put you under grace, because a true understanding of grace will move us to radical generosity.

2. I follow the principle of the tithe because it helps keep me consistent and disciplined

John Piper says that *'another name for serious intention is planning... failure to plan ...results not in spontaneity, but the same old rut'*. Since I started tithing at age 20, I have now had 17 years of tithing every month. For all these years it has been built into my budget as the first payment to go out each month. It has happened whether I have been in the mood or not, willing or not....it is a system that serves me and my frailty. And, on top of the tithe I have given regular offerings for those 17 years. I recently tried to estimate how much I have given away over these 17 years, and was stunned at the huge amount – oh the power of the consistent and proportional tithe! Tithing is not a law for me, it has become a means of grace, and a launch pad from which I can move into offerings well beyond 10%. It has served as an excellent tutor to lead me into giving that surpasses any Old Testament rule-keeping.

¹ Eph 2v8-9

3. I follow the principle of the tithe because it is proportional

No matter how much I earn, tithing keeps pace because it is a matter of proportion not amount.

4. I follow the principle of the tithe because it means giving the first 10%...and that is a demonstration of faith!

One of the key things about the law of the tithe in the Old Testament was that it was not giving any old 10%, but rather the *first* 10% of your income. This is the radical thing about the principle of the tithe. Giving the first tenth is a clear and powerful statement that you are putting God first – he is the first ‘bill’ you pay each month. Money talks. Think about it: you have no idea that you will come out okay that month. Unexpected bills might arrive that you could have used that 10% to pay. It is a statement of faith and trust in God to provide for you.

5. I follow the principle of the tithe to stay free from the love of money

I have found that consistently surrendering a decent portion of my income (10% plus) to God on a monthly basis is an act of faith, obedience and worship that stops me worshipping money¹. Ashleigh and I have always made our tithe and offerings the first item on our monthly budget, and we pay it before any other bill. This is because we are giving in faith, acknowledging that God is our source, not our bank balance. We know that if we seek God first, he will always provide for us². We love God more than we love money.

6. I follow the principle of the tithe because I soon get used to it and don't ‘miss’ the money

Once you are into the habit of tithing, then you get so used to living off 90% that you hardly even feel the hit. So, to keep on the faith stretch, Ashleigh and I always give more than just 10% each month, and we of course give big-time at each our churches three annual Gift Sundays. Remember, 10% is not a law, although it might be a good target for you early on, but before long you will want to outstrip it. We are not trying to find the bear minimum that we can get away with, rather how much we can get away with!

7. I follow the principle of the tithe because it sets the example for all members of our church.

We carefully explain to all new members that although the tithe is no longer a law for any of us, we recommend it as an appropriate amount for all members to give to the church each month. Some new members take a while to adjust their giving up to this level, and others are able to go well beyond that. We don't check up on people's level of giving, but we do urge everyone to excel in this grace of giving (2 Cor 8v7).

¹ Lk 6v46; Lk 16v11-14

² Mt 6v33. Phil 4v19

Some common questions about doing the ‘tithing’ today

If tithing is no longer a law, then why call it ‘tithing’ – isn’t it better to call it ‘giving’? Doesn’t tithing have an Old Testament and legalistic ring to it? A good point because we definitely don’t want any confusion about whether we are under law or grace. I am using the phrase ‘tithing’ in the non-law sense to define a base level method and amount of giving that I recommend to all believers, especially as a guide to help them develop the discipline of giving early on in their walk with Jesus.

Should I tithe on gross or net? Up to you, but I suggest you tithe the net profit of your business, but tithe the gross of your salary. This is because the *gross* is your actual income before tax. Someone once said, ‘Gross tithe leads to gross blessing’. Remember, we are not trying to work out what is the ‘least’ we can get away with giving, rather the most.

Should I tithe when my tithe is so small? Yes. God honours the attitude more than the amount.

What if I feel my tithe is too big for my local church? Our church has a world vision. I can’t imagine any amount too big for that!

Should I pay my debts first, and then start to tithe? I suggest that you start to tithe right away as an act of faith. Honour God and he will honour you. He will make your 90% go further than you could make go your 100%. But also pay unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar (Mt 22v21). Then stay out of debt (Rms 13v8; Pr 22v7).

Should I pay my tithe weekly or monthly? I suggest you give in keeping with the frequency of your pay cheque.

Should kids tithe? I suggest that you teach them young. **Should students receiving ‘grant’ money tithe it?** I suggest that you just tithe on pocket money and any other income, but not on student loans or fees.

Should I tithe on increase through interest, appreciation etc? I would. Any excuse to give.

Should I tithe on my pension? Although pensions are partly formed from money that you should have already tithed on over the years, they are often subsidized by other ‘increase’. I would say ‘Go for it!’ Remember, it’s all about faith and cheerful giving!

PART D: WHERE SHOULD WE GIVE TO?

Your local church should receive most of what you give away – this was certainly the New Testament pattern and it happened in ‘shadow’ form in the Old Testament when the Israelites gave their tithes and offerings to the priests¹. Your local church should have a leadership that you trust to handle the money, and they will use much of it on the running of the church and give much of it away to the poor and other initiatives that advance the gospel. In his book *The Gift of Giving*², R.T. Kendall talks straight about where he thinks that the bulk a believers giving should go:

“Tithing is the solution no one talks about. If every professing Christian would tithe, every congregation would be free of financial worries and could begin to truly be the salt of the earth. The church could begin to make an impact on the world that would change it. Instead, the church is paralysed through lack of funds” (Pg 12)

“Tithes, therefore, should be exclusively for the work of the gospel. Tithes should not be given to charity or any other noble work. When a Christian gives any part of his tithe to non-church organizations, no matter how valuable they may be to society, that Christian robs the church and therefore robs God. It is precisely why Moses needed to say in Lev 27v30 “All the tithe of the land, whether the seed of the land or the fruit of the tree is the Lord’s: it is holy unto the Lord. Non-church organizations should be supported by non-Christians, or by Christians who have first given all their tithes to the church, or by the church itself” (Pg 46).

ACTION

1. How do you feel about this exciting privilege of giving?
2. Are you happy to work towards giving away 10% plus to your local church?
3. What re-budgeting steps do you need to make so you are increasingly free to give?.....

¹ 1 Cor 9v13-14; Mal 3, 1 Chron 29v3

² 1982; Hodder & Stoughton